

HIGHWAYMAN'S HOLIDAY

What this story is about:

There are times when it may be convenient for a highwayman with a price on his head to work for a while on the side of the law—always provided of course that he is not caught himself.

When Jeremy Tregowan, son of a friendly innkeeper, was kidnapped, and it became apparent that a local band of smugglers were after a bigger prize than a few barrels of French brandy, highwayman and exciseman joined forces to defeat their sinister intentions and overthrow the mysterious "Shadow" who gave them their orders.

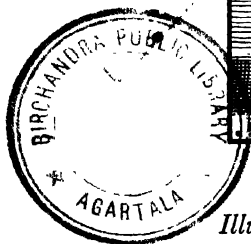


Frontispiece

The dragoons were close upon his heels.

Highwayman's Holiday

by D. M. SYMONDS



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Gentleman Jim Arrives

JEREMY TREGOWAN crouched on a narrow ledge of rock overlooking the cove, his eyes fixed to the strip of boulder-strewn sand which lay below him. The night was clear and still, lighted by a high, round moon, and only the gentle surge and murmur of the sea disturbed the silence. At his back lay the rugged acres of Cornwall, and a mile or so along the coast the cluster of cottages forming the village of Polryn nestled in a fold of the cliffs. It was just after two of the clock on an autumn morning.

Presently a speck of light winked like an eye offshore. The boy stirred and moved slightly to obtain a better view of the base of the cliff, where several wraith-like figures had appeared, flitting like ants between the jutting rocks. Gaining the strand, they made for the water's edge where one of their number raised aloft a shaded lanthorn. A furtive creak of oars was borne to Jeremy's ears and a boat loomed out of the darkness. The huddle of men advanced to meet it. There followed a low-toned snatch of talk, then the boat was unloaded; the squat packages and barricules it contained were humped through the surf and strapped to the backs of patiently standing horses.

These men were smugglers. The bales and casks they were landing so secretly might contain bolts of contraband silk and lace, wines and brandy, tobacco, snuff, tea and coffee (the latter

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cost twelve and sixpence a pound on the open market), or any of a score of other commodities upon which the government in this year of 1784 thought fit to impose a Customs duty. Smuggling was an unlawful activity, yet one so widespread and accepted that it had come to be regarded as respectable in certain quarters, and the officials of His Majesty's Customs and Excise were frowned upon and impeded in every way whenever they attempted to intercept the landing of an illicit cargo.

"Jeremy!"

A muffled figure scrambled down the headland.

The boy turned his head. "Why, Meg! What are you doing here?"

"Uncle Robert's lying in wait on the cliff path!" she panted. "Oh, Jeremy—suppose your father caught you spying on him!"

"I had to come," Jeremy replied. "A rumour was abroad at the tavern that the Preventive men would be out tonight. But you know my father: he wouldn't let an idle tale like that put him off. How did *you* find out about the run, anyway?"

The girl sat down by the cliff edge and tucked her skirt snugly around her ankles.

"Uncle Robert went to bed this afternoon," she said. "He never does that unless he means to travel abroad after dark. I felt sure he must be intending to waylay Mr. Tregowan so I climbed out of my bedroom window and watched by the inn. I saw your father leave; then, when you came out by the back way, I followed, not daring to approach your father myself."

"All seems quiet enough at present." Jeremy leaned over as he spoke, to scan the rugged contours of the cliffs. "They're making for the cliff top now, by way o' the gulley, and the boat's gone." He turned his gaze to the girl's shadowed features. "Thanks for coming, Meg, but you'd best be off now. If your aunt discovered

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you were out of the house at this hour of the night she'd be furious. I'll warn Father of the trap that's set for him."

Meg obediently moved away towards the village: her small form was soon lost amidst the shadows.

Jeremy rose to his feet and sped along the cliff top in the direction of the furtive procession of men and beasts which was mounting the track towards the headland. Abednigo Tregowan, the smugglers' leader, was a giant of a man. By day, in his role as host of the Golden Mace, Polryn's only inn, he was a pillar of respectability; but after nightfall he assumed a different guise, that of smuggler, friend of footpads and "gentleman of the road." Just now he was in a cheerful frame of mind. The lugger from Calais had been on time and all had gone well. Soon the night's haul of contraband would be on its way to London and another bag of guineas would find its way into his strongbox.

"Why, Jeremy lad! What ails ye?" he exclaimed as his panting son came into view.

"Mr. Prescott and his fellows are waiting along the cliff path!" The words tumbled out in his eagerness.

"Well, if that be so then we must face 'em," his father grunted. "We can't take the horses over the moors; the going's too rough for this light. Thanks for tippin' me the word—but ye never should ha' followed me, just the same. I'll have a word with ye later on that count."

The party had gained the summit of the cliff by this time and was now moving along the winding path. Moonlight silvered the gorse bushes like hoar frost. The path fell into many hollows, dipping between the granite crags into pools of blackness. It was in one of these sheltered places that the tide waiters were lurking, armed with loaded sticks. Jeremy, following in the wake of his father's band, saw the skulking figures rise and attack.

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The fight waxed hot for several minutes, for the smugglers were prepared for such an emergency, having staves and knives concealed about their persons. Abednigo alone was the equal of several ordinary men, and what with the dim light of the gorse-studded hollow and the toughness of the giant's followers, the forces of law did not have things their own way. Jeremy remained in the shelter of the bushes, there being nothing he could do either to help his father or hinder the Revenue men. Accordingly, he was the first to set eyes on a tall fellow in a tricorne hat and mask and many-caped riding coat who had appeared from the shadows and stood watching the brawl. Each of his hands held a cocked pistol.

"Now gents," the newcomer presently drawled. "Time's up. Kindly raise your daddles an' stand still, else one o' these barkers might happen to go off."

The combatants paused, turning on their heels to see who dared thus to address them; and such was the look in the stranger's eyes that knives and cudgels were dropped and empty palms raised, as smugglers and Revenue men alike obeyed the command.

"That's better; more peaceful like." Bright eyes glittered through the slits in the mask. "Now, them as follows law an' order stand to the left." The newcomer gestured with one pistol.

The crestfallen minions of the crown moved to one side of the path.

"Abednigo!"

The massive figure of the smugglers' leader stepped forward a pace. "Gentleman Jim Hawker, by the powers! Ye've turned up mighty convenient. But what're ye doin' in these parts?"

"On my way to see you, Ab. But come, set your cullies to tying up these red beetles. I'm weary for a drop of rum posset. As

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for Tony"—he nodded towards a fine chestnut stallion which stood placidly cropping the grass a yard or two back along the path—"he's covered more than thirty miles since he touched oats."

The Preventive men were relieved of their weapons, securely lashed, and bundled into the bushes. Then the smugglers continued along the cliff path with Gentleman Jim and Abednigo in the fore and Jeremy in train a short distance behind.

The Golden Mace was an old and rambling inn whose walls of rough-hewn stone had withstood the ravages of wind and tempest for centuries. The windows, small-paned and glazed for the most part with bullseye glass, peered down upon the road leading to the village and beyond it to the rough pasture-land and the sea. Abednigo ushered his guest into the parlour where, despite the lateness of the hour, a cheerful fire blazed in the wide hearth.

"Now, Jim; tell me what business brings ye this way," said the landlord, bending to light a candle at the fire.

The visitor shrugged off his heavy coat and tossed it, along with his three-cornered hat, on to the seat of a carved settle.

"Fell into a mite o' trouble Truro way," he explained, dropping into a chair. "Held up a flash-looking chaise on the Falmouth road—winged the coachman 'afore they'd stop. When I caught up and took a peek inside, there sits His Honour Justice Pumphreys! He must have been doing the rounds of the Quarter Sessions. I knew the cut of his miserable jib at once. Had his purse, though—thought I might as well. 'I know you,' croaks His Honour. 'You're Gentleman Jim Hawker. I'll see you're brought to book for this, you scoundrel! I'll have a man from Bow Street sent down especially.' Well, after that I thought it might be best to take a bit of a holiday, so I came straight to

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Polryn. I knew you'd be pleased to see me—and so you were, eh!"

While he was giving this account of himself the highwayman lounged in the high-backed chair as if he had not a single care in the world.

Abednigo looked worried. "Here's hopin' ye haven't brought trouble wi' ye!" he remarked as he made the rum posset. "There'll be enough o' that to go round as it is when Mr. Prescott and his fellers are found. But he's none the better off for comin' upon us red-handed: he's known for a long time that it's me who runs the smugglin' in Polryn. 'Tis proof, he's after, as well as a capture—an' he'd have had both this night if you hadn't chanced along."

The highwayman straightened up and accepted the tankard of rum. "There's another reason brought me hither, Ab.," he said. "If you're in the mood to listen I'll tell it to you." *

The burly innkeeper leaned forward and Jim Hawker began to talk earnestly.

Jeremy watched as his father's men stowed the pack-horse loads away behind the false wall in the stable: then he crossed the yard to the row of outbuildings which flanked the rear of the inn, climbed to the rough slates of the roof and entered his bedroom by the window.

His heart was still pounding because of the brush with the Revenue men. Who the tall stranger was there was no telling, but his timely intervention had saved his father from arrest and imprisonment. Why should the landlord of a thriving tavern risk his neck with a gang of smugglers? He'd heard Abednigo give a dozen reasons, railing against the prohibitive cost of brandy and wines, which had all but driven those nourishing juices off the

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market. "And why," his father would argue, "should a poor henwife not be able to buy a length of cloth at a price she can afford to pay? The Revenue men are Satan's minions! They'll wring the last penny piece out of an honest trader to keep the king an' his favourites in luxury!"

But Jeremy well knew that none of these was the true reason. Abednigo was a man who craved excitement, needed it as other men need air to breathe. And it kept him sober; for when the weeks went by with no prospect of a run in the offing, then he would think upon his dead wife and take to the bottle for solace. Having a man like Abednigo for a father was a big responsibility, Jeremy decided.

And then there was Meg Prescott. What would her uncle say if he discovered that his niece had been out in the small hours, talking with the son of the man he had set out to waylay, giving away his carefully laid plan? Meg was a good friend to have. She knew that he, Jeremy, had taken to following his father whenever he went about his unlawful business, and that he was worried lest His Majesty's Customs, in the person of Mr. Robert Prescott, should lay him by the heels. That knowledge had been sufficient to drive her from her bed to warn him, at the cost of her loyalty to her uncle.

Jeremy had succeeded in shutting these thoughts from his mind, and was almost asleep, when a great commotion arose on the ground floor of the inn. He heard several resounding blows on the front door and the sound of his father's heavy tread; then a voice, an officious, pompous voice, urging those within to "Open in the King's name." There was a clatter as the bolts were withdrawn and Abednigo complied with this demand. Slipping out of bed, Jeremy padded along the passage to the head of the stairs.

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The innkeeper was standing by the open door, a candlestick in his fist. A stout man occupied the threshold. His laced hat and silver-mounted stick proclaimed that he was a beadle. His coat and boots were mired by the dust of a lengthy journey.

"Gentleman Jim Hawker," he said peremptorily. "He's within, I take it?"

"What makes ye so sure o' that?" grunted Abednigo.

"Oh come!" The visitor took a ponderous pace into the house. "I've chased him all the way from Truro. He's gone no farther, that I'll warrant. I was told that he had a friend in these parts, an innkeeper near to Poltyn, and this is the only inn hereabouts. Also it would appear that you have company." The beadle's prominent eyes came to rest on the two half empty tankards. "Why else should you be about and dressed at this hour of the night?"

"That's my affair."

"You'll have no objections to my taking a look?" The beadle advanced another step. "All in the course of duty, you know."

He entered the parlour and snatched up one of the tankards. It was warm to his touch. The casement window stood ajar, the curtains were drawn aside.

"Aha! So the bird has flown! You'll hear farther on this matter. Goodnight to you."

The beadle turned on his heel and was gone. Abednigo, and Jeremy at the stair head, heard the brisk patter of his feet as he made towards the rear of the inn.

The innkeeper closed and bolted the door; then, setting down the candlestick, he shut the tell-tale window and drew the curtains.

Gentleman Jim came out of the tall press where he had been hiding and resumed his seat by the fire.

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"Ye can't stay here," said Abednigo. "That cove'll pay us another visit shortly, I'll wager."

The highwayman crossed his legs and drained the measure of rum which had so intrigued the beadle. "True." He smacked his lips. "How about the Druid's Stone? D'ye still use that place?"

"Aye; an' real handy its proved this many a time. There's flint an' steel—and a lanthorn an' water jar. If ye take a bite to eat with ye, ye'll be real comfortable."

"Then I'll be off. Ye'll see to Tony? Give him a feed and a rub down."

Abednigo nipped out the candle, and crossing to the window, peered out at the inn yard. The beadle was nowhere in sight.

"All's clear, I should say." The innkeeper eased the window open and, pausing only to collect the parcel of food which Abednigo rapidly prepared, Gentleman Jim clambered out and vanished into the shadow of the stone wall skirting the inn yard.

Abednigo went out presently and groomed the highwayman's stallion, which stood along with two or three other mounts in the stable. Then he sought his bed, passing in the process Jeremy's room, where the occupant had at length settled to slumber.

The Beadle Takes a Room

THE Golden Mace entertained two early visitors the following morning. The first was Mr. Robert Prescott of His Majesty's Customs, who arrived before Jeremy had finished sweeping the tap-room. He strode to the counter and called for a tankard of ale. Abednigo, the last man on earth to shirk an issue, pushed Bessie the serving wench aside and attended to this customer himself. "A grand mornin', sir," he said, every inch the innkeeper, as he flicked the ale casks with his cloth.

"Aye—a finish night, too," replied the Revenue officer, proferring a coin. "Too pleasant by far to have been wasted abed."

"That it was indeed!" agreed Abednigo, not in the least abashed. "But I'm a man who loves his bed. O' course, *your* business takes you abroad o' nights, sir. Then smugglers don't keep law abidin' hours like decent folks. Ye look a mite tired this mornin'. Don't tell me ye laid any o' those smugglers by the heels last night!"

Mr. Prescott frowned. "Very nearly. 'Tis only a question of time. Proof and a red-handed capture are all I need."

"Well, sir, I wishes ye luck!" Having thus gauged the set of the wind, the burly innkeeper bowed himself away to his private quarters.



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The second arrival was none other than the Truro beadle. He made no pretence of being a casual caller.

"Landlord!" he called, pounding the counter.

Abednigo reappeared, bearing a keg of rum which he arranged on the counter so that the duty stamp showed plainly.

"What can I do for ye, sir?" he enquired. "I trust ye caught the man ye were after last night."

"I did not," replied the other brusquely. "But I am certain that he was within this tavern when I called—and that he made off through the window whilst you were fiddling with the door bolts. A solitary man don't use two glasses."

"Come, sir; think o' my good name!" Abednigo affected a show of indignation. "But there, I bear ye no ill will; and as for the rum; why, one measure never was no manner o' use to me, an' to draw two saves a journey."

"I'll take a glass of ale," said the beadle ungraciously.

He carried his glass to a wheel-back chair, hard by the Excise officer. They exchanged wary glances.

"A fine day, sir," ventured the beadle.

"Aye, indeed. A stranger to Polryn?"

"That I am: from Truro. I am on the track of a rascally highwayman, one Jim Hawker by name."

"A tall fellow in a tricorne hat?" enquired Mr. Prescott.

"And a buff greatcoat with three capes."

"Hmm!"

"Your pardon, sir?"

"Merely thoughts. You will be staying in Polryn long?"

"A matter of days—until I catch my man." The beadle puffed himself out. "I was despatched in pursuit of the ruffian by Justice Pumphreys, who has suffered both loss and insult at the fellow's hands." He glanced fretfully at Jeremy.

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"Can you not sweep elsewhere, lad? The dust is choking me!"

"Well, I wish you luck." Mr. Prescott rose to his feet, inclined his head in a modest bow and took his leave.

The beadle lingered in disgruntled silence for a time; then he, too, departed.

Jeremy met Meg at noon as she left the dame school, an establishment conducted by Margery Pengallon, a spinster of uncertain age and temper, at her cottage in the village street. Although Meg was twelve her uncle insisted on her remaining with Mistress Pengallon for at least another twelvemonth, much to her dismay. Mr. Prescott maintained that although she was merely a girl a little extra schooling would do her naught but good, and help her to a better match when the time came. His eyes should have told him that she would stand in need of no such aid, for his niece showed promise of blossoming into an extremely pretty miss. Jeremy had left his schooling far behind, being now well on for fourteen years of age.

"I have to thank you again, Meg, for coming to our aid last night," Jeremy said as they strolled down the steep incline towards the harbour and Mr. Prescott's house.

"I only wish that I could have told you earlier," she replied. "But when I saw Uncle Robert this morning I knew that his night's work had been to no purpose. He was looking as sour as a lemon!"

"He waylaid the smugglers by Nod's Hollow," Jeremy told her, "but a strange man in a mask appeared and held the Revenue men at pistol point whilst Father and his cronies tied them up. Your uncle spent an uncomfortable night in the open, I fear.

"Who was the stranger?" Meg asked curiously.

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"Some old acquaintance of Father's—a gentleman of the road by the looks of him. We had a beadle at the inn this morning, making enquiries. It appears that Father took him back there last night—the highwayman, I mean. That was when the beadle first arrived. I'd only just gone to bed when he thundered at the door. Father tricked him, though! The beadle intends to stay in the village for a while in the hope of capturing the highwayman. I noticed two strange horses in the stable this morning: one a piebald mare that looked to be the beadle's, the other a chestnut stallion with white socks and a fine set of harness. If that's the highwayman's mount, Father's taking a big risk in keeping him there!"

They parted company at Meg's gate, and Jeremy turned to make his way back to the inn. But he had not taken many steps when he encountered one of his father's chief cronies.

"Mornin', Jeremy!"

Ebenezer Catchpole was a tiny dried up twig of a man, whose bright eyes, set in a wizened, monkeyish face, darted forever this way and that, missing nothing. Clad in a tarpaulin coat and a huge pair of seaboots, he was bearing a great heap of nets upon his back and was in the act of descending a flight of worn stone steps which led down to the water's edge where his boat the *Elizabeth* was moored. He displayed no signs of weariness, though he must have been up the whole of the night returning the horses borrowed for the run, a duty delegated to him by his leader, Abednigo.

"Good morning, Mr. Catchpole," returned Jeremy, making to pass by. But the shrivelled little fisherman's hand shot out to detain him.

"Message for yer father," he said, lowering his voice to a conspiratorial whisper. "Bring Tony to Tor Point; three o'clock. Ye

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won't forget it, will ye, Jeremy? An' tell him I've seen several o' Patch's men about."

"I'll let him know as soon as I get home," Jeremy promised.

He found his father humping up ale casks from the cellar and straightway passed on the mysterious communication.

Abednigo nodded. "Aye, I'll do that—right pleased to be rid o' the brute!" Jeremy noticed that he made no reference to the latter portion of the message.

"Ye may ha' heard me speak o' Gentleman Jim Hawker," the innkeeper went on. "'Twas he who showed up so unexpected last night. He told me he'd to lie low for a bit, an' he went up to the cave by the Druid's Stone."

"He's a highwayman, Father! Why do you help him?" asked Jeremy, greatly daring.

Abednigo frowned. "I please myself who I makes friends with, ye forward young pup! Besides, didn't he help me an' the rest last night? He did me a good turn, too, years ago. I stands by my friends, whomsoever they may be!"

There were lowering clouds and a grey sky when Abednigo set off for Tor Point that afternoon. He bestrode an old mare and led the highwayman's mount by the bridle. He climbed the hillside beyond the village by a path which wound away to become a mere cattle track in the barren uplands and vanished altogether in the stony soil fringing the granite outcrops. Tor Point was the most prominent of these, a rugged finger of rock upended centuries ago by human hands. Jim Hawker's stallion, scenting the keen, heather-tinged air, reared and plunged, so that the innkeeper found it all he could do to control him. But he arrived at length at the appointed meeting place.

"Well met, Ab.!" cried Gentleman Jim, rising like a sprite

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from the rocks and advancing to meet his friend. "What news o' my cully the beadle?"

"He was pryin' around again this morning," replied Abed-nigo, mopping his forehead. "An' this afternoon, back he comes to book a room! I couldn't refuse him without it seemin' suspicious. Ye'll ha' to steer clear o' the inn for a bit."

"I'll do that, and thanks for your help, Ab. The cave'll make snug quarters for a day or two; and the fodder ye've brought will last us out, eh, Tony?" He slapped the powerful stallion's rump affectionately. "But come Thursday I must be out and about on a piece o' business. The Stage passes through on that day, from Penzance—passes through Polryn about seven in the evenin', I was told."

"This be Cobby Jenks' territory," warned the innkeeper. "Ye'd best keep from off his corns—he's a killer! Hangs out Prestwyn way, a couple o' miles farther along the coast. He's been ridin' this stretch o' the highway for some time. Killed the driver of Sir Nicholas Pringle's coach only a month ago, an' lifted his lady's sparklers. We had the military out over that, a ferretin' into everyone's affairs. But they didn't catch as much as a smell o' the feller. Sir Nicholas offered a reward o' fifty guineas to anyone takin' him in, but we're a tight crew hereabouts an' no one's collected the blunt so far."

"Fifty guineas!" Jim Hawker rubbed his chin. (There was double that price on his own head.) "A heap o' golden boys like that wouldn't come amiss to a poor man like me. Pity it'd go against my high principles to set myself in the way of collecting it! But how are things with you, Ab., after last night? Don't forget that bit of business we discussed, will you!"

"Nay, I won't forget. But I must own I'm not keen on it. Ain't never stooped to such a thing 'afore. More in Patch Hen-

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derson's line o' country. Still, if there be as much in it as you say, 'tis temptin'."

"Who might Patch Henderson be?" Jim Hawker enquired.

"Why, a rascally fellow as does a run now and again. Not that I hold that against him—bein' in the same line o' business myself, as you know. But he don't stop short at smugglin', whereas I have—up till now. What's more, he's a friend o' Cobby Jenks, an' ye don't have to say more than that."

"Well, you've three weeks to make up your mind," the highwayman replied. "Say you let me know a week from today if you're agreeable. I shall still be hereabouts."

"Aye; I'll do that. 'Twill take till then to get rid o' last night's haul. The kegs'll bide safe enough where they are; but how I'm to have 'em shifted with that beadle friend o' yours poking about at all hours o' the day an' night, to say nothing of Mr. Prescott, I don't know. Farewell to ye, Jim. If there's ought I can do, let me know by way o' Ebenezer Catchpole."

Abednigo threw a leg over the mare's back and rode away in the direction of Polryn and the Golden Mace.

Jeremy felt worried, as he always did when a consignment of contraband lay within the secret compartment in the stable. Usually the dangerous cache was disposed of within a day or so of the run, despite Mr. Prescott's vigilance, moving landwards under cover of night. Jeremy had no notion who his father's contacts were, but a more astute brain than Abednigo's was working somewhere in the background. Messages arrived at the Golden Mace by carrier pigeon, and he had heard his father refer to cargoes which hailed from places as far apart as Looe and Saint Ives. And all found their way into the same hands in London. Now, on

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top of the narrow escape of the previous night, and the increased activity on Mr. Prescott's part which must surely ensue, there was the complication of Gentleman Jim's presence, and that of his attendant beadle. Jeremy knew better than to attempt to dissuade his father from continuing with his escapades; he had tried that in the past with no success. All had been well while his mother was alive; she had ruled her wayward husband with a firm hand. But since her death three years since Abednigo had plied his illicit trade without restraint, straying ever farther from the paths of respectability in his quest for excitement.

The beadle's tea was warming in the oven, a huge golden-crusted pasty which Bessie had made earlier in the day. She had entrusted the watching of it to Jeremy whilst she laid a place for that gentleman in the parlour. The beadle was seated in a comfortable chair, a sheaf of printed forms spread across his ample thighs. As Jeremy watched he helped himself to a pinch of snuff from a metal box and dusted his scarlet waistcoat. Glancing up, he espied the boy at the door.

"Come hither, young man," he said sternly.

Leaving the pasty to fend for itself, Jeremy entered the parlour.

"Heard you ought of a visitor last night?"

"No, sir—save when you knocked in the small hours."

"Hm. You saw no sign at that time of a second person—taking his leave by a window, maybe?"

"That I did not, sir."

"If you should chance to set eyes on a tall man in a caped greatcoat and a three-cornered hat, hanging about the village, I should take it kindly if you informed me. 'Tis your plain duty, boy. The man is a wrongdoer with a price on his head. You see these papers? They are to be posted about the district."

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Jeremy eyed the notices in question, which read :

“Wanted : Dead or Alive. One hundred guineas will be paid for Information leading to the apprehension of one known as Gentleman Jim Hawker, highwayman. All communications relating to the whereabouts of the said miscreant to James Tittletoft, Beadle, at the Golden Mace, Polryn.”

“Your father, if I mistake me not, is in league with this fellow,” the beadle continued, drawing down the corners of his mouth. “I have my suspicions and you would do well to come to me if you have any information concerning this rogue.”

This lecture would have been prolonged but for the cloud of black smoke which suddenly issued from the kitchen, along with the despairing shrieks of Bessie the serving wench.

“Lawks! The gentleman's pasty! Jeremy, where are you? Master Jeremy!” Bessie appeared, bearing the charred remains of the pasty, her cap awry. “Oh you bad boy! I told you to watch it. Oh, sir; you'll ha' to dine on cold brawn an' pickles. I'm that sorry!”

Abednigo returned to the inn at that instant but, noting the beadle's forbidding visage and the smoking ruin of the pasty, he retired to the kitchen, leaving Bessie to soothe that irate individual as best she could.

But the innkeeper was not to escape the worst blow of the day, for no sooner had he lowered his great frame into an easy chair than a thunderous rapping at the door heralded the arrival of Mr. Prescott and his subordinates, armed with a warrant to search the precincts of the Golden Mace for contraband.

The Biters Bit!

ABEDNIGO heaved himself erect and went to the door, where stood Mr. Prescott along with six of his men, who still bore the scars they had come by the previous night.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Prescott. Shall it be a glass o' rum all round?"

"You must know I'm here on duty," said that worthy with a frown. He held out a parchment with a pendant seal. "Here is my authority to search your inn, so let's be about it, if you please!"

"How can you do such a thing to an honest feller!" Abednigo adopted an attitude of outraged virtue. "Here's you an' me, known one another for years and never a hard word 'atween us till today. Now this! All I can say is, go an' search, an' if ye find so much as a pipe o' baccy or a pinch o' snuff as hasn't been duty paid, then ye may take me off to Tyburn an' draw an' quarter me!"

Having expressed these sentiments, he stood aside from the threshold to allow the representatives of the law a free hand.

They worked thoroughly, looking into every room and cupboard, stamping down to examine the cellars; nothing was left to chance. Even the attics were turned out, a ladder being specially sent for.

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Mr. Prescott's expression grew even more stern, and when it became evident that nothing of a dutiable nature lay concealed within the ancient walls of the inn, he ordered attention to be paid to the stables and outbuildings.

For a further half-hour the Revenue men continued their efforts, delving deep into every bale of hay, wrenching the covers from hogsheads and sweeping aside the straw littering the stable



floor in case it concealed a trap-door. But all these endeavours brought no reward.

The Excise officer turned away and, summoning his stalwarts, was about to take his leave, when the diminutive figure of Ebenezer Catchpole ambled into the yard. He carried a string of fish to supply curious eyes with a reason for his visit: but this did not deceive Mr. Prescott.

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"Er—evenin' all," said Mr. Catchpole, plainly taken aback.

"Mr. Catchpole, is it not?" said the Excise officer heavily.

"At yer service—with a string o' fresh fish for me old friend Ab. Tregowan. Here be, Ab."

He held the string of fish out and Abednigo took them with a grunt.

"Well . . ." Ebenezer looked around at the circle of unsmiling faces. "I'll be gettin' along. Good e'en to ye once more."

Lifting the brim of his hat a fraction by way of salutation, the little fisherman turned about, and scuttled off in the direction he had come.

Mr. Prescott turned to the innkeeper. "I apologise for any inconvenience I may have caused you," he said stiffly. "Good day."

The Revenue man marshalled his underlings and they stamped out of the inn yard.

Abednigo mopped his brow.

No sooner had the Customs men rounded the bend in the road than a wrinkled face popped over the mossy stone capping of the wall. This was shortly followed by a scrawny body and two legs encased in sea boots. Mr. Catchpole dropped lightly to the earth and darted across the yard towards his leader.

"Urgent news, Ab.," he reported. "Couldn't tell you with that there busybody Prescott standin' by. Patch Henderson be a'goin' to raid the Golden Mace tonight! He's got wind o' the stuff cached in the stable."

"How might that have happened?" Abednigo asked with a frown.

"I'm not sure o' that Tom Cushion; he's a downy 'un."

"Did ye hear ought as to when they might be expected?"

"T'wont be till after midnight, I should say. Moon's up about one; they won't arrive 'afore then. I've passed the word for the

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lads to come round after supper. Ye can station 'em about the yard, ready to give Patch an' his pals a welcome."

"Aye," said Abednigo thoughtfully. "Mayhap we could get the stuff off afore then. But no; 'twould prove tricky work in the dark o' the moon. We'll fight it out wi' Patch! We'll slice his loaf for him! See ye around ten, Ebenezer."

Jeremy, watchful at his window, saw his father's band enter the inn yard in twos and threes. Abednigo stationed them in odd corners, padding about the flagstones in carpet slippers. Then, armed with stout cudgels, they waited in the dark for signs of the enemy, a man having been posted in the road to give warning.

Presently the moon swung into view, dispersing the blackness. At a trifle after one of the clock the sentinel hastened in to report that the rival gang was heading towards the inn across the fields. The men in the yard braced themselves.

A dark hump suddenly appeared over the wall top near the stable end. An arm sought a hold and the first of the enemy leaped down into the yard. Then came another and another, silently scaling the wall and clustering in its shadow. Patch was there, swinging a club, his single eye glittering in the dim light. There followed a few seconds' pause then the innkeeper whistled and his men darted from their places of concealment, brandishing staves.

The invaders were caught unawares. They had no notion that Abednigo was alert and prepared for their attack. Thus, in the first few minutes the innkeeper's party had an advantage. They pressed the intruders hard and Jeremy heard the soft padding of feet, the gasps and grunts of warring men and the vicious crack of wooden staves falling on flesh and bone.

But Patch Henderson was not a man to be bested so easily, and

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he rallied his force, pushing forward against the weight of the innkeeper's onslaught. He had twenty men, against the innkeeper's dozen, and presently the straining mass of bodies surged away from the boundary wall and the defenders found themselves in retreat.

Abednigo fought like the giant he was, charging repeatedly into the thick of his assailants; but his very size was something of a handicap and all too often his bull-like rushes and mighty strokes fell upon empty air. Patch's men had met their match in Ebenezer Catchpole, however, for there was none to touch him in the art of evasive footwork and lightning blow. He hopped about the inn yard like a sparrow, tapping here a head and there an arm, leaving a trail of howling victims in his wake.

Suddenly the beadle's window rattled up.

"What is going on?" he bellowed, thrusting his nightcapped head far out into the night air. "Bless my soul!"

Down crashed the window, and, pausing only to don his trousers, the beadle rushed downstairs and into the yard.

"Stop this at once!" he shouted, flourishing his staff of office. "D'ye hear! Stop this brawling at once, I say!"

No one paid the slightest heed to this command, so the beadle shortened his grip on the stick and prepared to deal out summary justice. Abednigo, none too pleased at this intervention in so personal an affair, and anxious that the beadle should not take too close a look at the members of either party, twisted round and spared a blow for the pompous official's head. The beadle dropped as if he had been pole-axed and displayed no further interest in the affray.

Things were not going too well with the defending force, however. They fought—those that remained on their feet—with their backs to the stable wall. The need for secrecy being past, one of

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Patch's men lighted a lantern and its tawny beams illumined the sweating features of the assailants, whilst the moon from high above limned the shoulders of their worn coats.

Patch Henderson knew that the contraband goods were hidden somewhere in the stable, and now, with the prize so near, he urged his minions to even greater efforts. There followed a stiff but unavailing action to defend the stable door; then the remnant of Abednigo's force was overcome and the exultant invaders crowded in through the entrance.

The horses reared in their stalls, neighing in terror. Patch searched the walls and floor of the stable with his eye in an attempt to locate the secret compartment; and as soon as the glowering innkeeper and his followers had been roped firmly he set his underlings to tearing down the mangers and smiting the walls with their cudgels.

It was destined to be a night of misfortunes for Abednigo and his band, for sheer mischance brought the cleverly disguised recess to light. A man had been told to lead out the horses and as he pulled at the halter of a particularly fractious beast it lashed out with its hind feet, catching the movable section of the wall a heavy blow. The catch gave and the partition collapsed, bringing to light the mound of bales and barrels.

Patch gave a shout of triumph and darted forward. Mastering his jubilation with an effort, he issued swift instructions. The contents of the secret compartment were swiftly humped into the yard and across to the gate. A signal was given and a fellow leading a string of pack-horses moved towards the inn. Within a space of minutes the proceeds of Abednigo's latest run had been loaded on to their backs.

When this was done Patch took mocking leave of his rivals.

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"Good e'en to ye, gents all," he said, bowing so low that the brim of his hat brushed the straw of the stable floor. "Much obliged for the little load o' stuff. See ye again sometime!" Then he retreated, leaving the sulphurous innkeeper and his companions bound and helpless in the mired straw of the stable.

Jeremy dashed downstairs and into the yard, furious with himself for falling asleep in the thick of the fight. He had awakened in time to witness Patch's departure, however, and was torn between staying to release his father and following the victorious invaders. A second's thought decided him on the latter course and, flitting in the shadows, he made off along the highway on the heels of the laden horses and joyful ruffians.

The procession wound its way along the lane, with Jeremy following at a distance of some twenty paces. About half a mile had been covered in this fashion when, with no other warning than a pattering rush of feet, the disreputable company was set upon by a score of armletted men.

Emitting a howl of rage, Patch loosed his hold of the pack-horse's bridle and lashed out at the shadowy figures which sprang up as if by magic on all sides. His men followed suit; but the recent battle had taken the spring out of their movements. Several of them, moreover, had received severe knocks in the inn yard. These factors combined to set Patch's faction at a disadvantage, and the affair was soon settled. Mr. Prescott, for he it was, ordered his men to rope the miscreants together, and, along with the pack-horses, they were marched off in the direction of Polryn.

The Revenue man was not entirely pleased. It was Abednigo he was after. He had been waiting close to the Golden Mace in the hope that the innkeeper would despatch his haul whilst the moon was up; but his ambitions in that direction had been

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thwarted. He had apprehended Patch Henderson, however, along with a sizeable portion of his band, and with that he would have to rest content for the present, although he was rather puzzled by their presence so near Abednigo's tavern.

Jeremy, overjoyed at this change of fortune, retraced his steps to the inn.

He found his father and his satellites fuming and cursing in the stable. He cut them free and they assisted one another into the parlour, where cuts and bruises were bathed and ruffled tempers soothed with draughts of ale. The bodies strewn about the yard were next attended to, none of the wounds sustained in the recent encounter proving fatal. Three of Patch's men were discovered in a battered condition, and after their hurts had been bandaged these were shut in a convenient outhouse. The beadle was still unconscious and breathing stentoriously. Abednigo soured his head and poured a generous measure of brandy into his open mouth. Mr. Tittleton sat up, coughing and spluttering.

"Where? Who? What has happened, innkeeper?"

"Set on by footpads, so we were," Abednigo informed him. "Thank ye kindly for yer help, sir. A right handy man wi' a cudgel, so ye be. If it hadn't been for you they'd a'downed us for sure. Where did they catch ye, sir? The pate, was it? Sit ye back an' take another sip o' brandy."

The beadle adopted this suggestion, fondling the lump on his head. "Who are these men?" he then inquired.

"Naught but a few friends o' mine as chanced to be passing. I should get back to bed if I was you." With a deal of flattery and many reassurances, Abednigo bundled the shaken beadle up to his room.

When he returned to the parlour he joined his companions in ruefully discussing their loss.

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"Nigh on six hundred guineas worth," the innkeeper asserted. "An' to think that such a villain as Patch Henderson should reap the benefit!"

"An' leave us with naught to show for our labours save cuts an' bruises," Ebenezer chimed in.

"This night's work is more likely to cost Patch his life," Jeremy retorted, and he went on to describe the Excise officer's successful ambush. "Patch and his followers were marched away with their tails between their legs," the boy concluded. "What's more, Mr. Prescott will never believe them if they try to tell him the truth of the matter."

"But that means our skins are safe!" his father exclaimed. "At least, for the time bein'."

The battered company had listened to Jeremy's tale with their mouths agape; now, as the humour of the situation dawned upon them, they forgot the loss of their precious cargo and burst into roars of helpless mirth.



A Case of Mistaken Identity

At a trifle before seven of the clock on the following Thursday evening, Gentleman Jim Hawker forsook the solitude of his retreat at Tor Point and, mounted on Tony, trotted down towards the Penzance road. He had surveyed the territory on the previous day and decided on the best spot for his purpose, a wooded spinney at the crest of a steep rise. The coach would be travelling at its slowest pace when it passed that place, the horses weary from the uphill climb. The highwayman was hoping for some rich pickings. He had been idle for too long, Jim Hawker decided. It had been irksome to have to remain in hiding all day, though, thanks to Abednigo, the beadle's activities had been temporarily suspended. That gentleman was confined to his bed by the blow he had received "defending the inn against footpads." How they had laughed when the innkeeper had related this episode, which had ended in the capture of Patch Henderson.

The evening shadows were closing in when he came to the highway. The pale riband of road, encrusted with fallen leaves, wound away, rising and falling with the undulations of the rugged countryside. There was no one in sight. At his left rose the tors, their contours dark against the fading sky. The spinney echoed to the harsh cawing of rooks whose nests abounded in the lofty elms. Tony picked his way into the undergrowth. Here was

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admirable concealment. Gentleman Jim reined in his mount and looked to the priming of his pistols.

A dull rumble of wheels in the distance told him that he had chosen his time well. The highwayman took a mask of black silk from one of his capacious pockets and tied it over his face.

To an accompaniment of creaks and groans, the graceless vehicle lumbered up the incline, the four horses throwing their combined weight on to the traces, encouraged now and again by a masterly flick of the coachman's whip. The outside passengers were walking some distance to the rear, it being customary for them to do so in such circumstances. Jim Hawker tensed and prepared to urge his horse forward on to the highway.

Then, without the least warning, a second cloaked horseman burst from a covert some twenty yards down the hill and trotted smartly towards the coach. Raising a heavy pistol, the mounted figure issued the familiar and dreaded challenge:

"Stand and deliver!"

As the coach rumbled to a halt the guard lifted his blunderbuss. A loud report reverberated amidst the high points of rock and the guard crumpled in his seat. The stranger slipped his still-smoking weapon into a saddle holster and drew its twin. "Stand, I say! You inside there—out wi' you!"

Five assorted whey-faced gentry descended to the road. The mounted man produced a cloth bag. "Put yer valuables in that, an' be sharp about it."

He tossed the bag to the ground and the pistol jerked alarmingly. The passengers tremulously did as he had instructed, after which the bag was returned to its owner, who stowed it away.

Gentleman Jim had been taken aback at this appearance of a rival in the field. It could be none other than Cobby Jenks! His sharp wits swiftly conceived a fresh course of action and, whip-

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ping off the mask, he urged Tony to a canter, arriving within a few seconds at the scene of the hold-up.

Cobby Jenks turned his head to see who was approaching and found that he was being covered by a steady pistol. For an instant he weighed his chance of a shot: then, realising the slim prospect of success, raised his hands.

"I am an officer of the law," said Gentleman Jim, adopting a suitably stern tone of voice. "I've been on this fellow's track for days." He spurred Tony forward and relieved Cobby of his weapon. "Your valuables will be returned to you in due course, gentlemen, but for the present I must retain the articles in that bag as evidence. Make your claims to the Truro magistrates. Now you; get moving!"

Cobby scowlingly obeyed and the two men rode away in the direction of Polryn, leaving the astounded passengers standing by their coach, the lighter by the weight of their purses.

After they had covered a short distance Cobby turned in his saddle and eyed his captor suspiciously.

"Who are ye?" he snarled. "Ye're no busy—you've the cut of a tobyman yerself!"

"No matter who I am," snapped Gentleman Jim. "Just do as I say an' keep on along the road—an' hand over that parcel o' swag."

Cobby bent and fumbled at his saddle-bow: but instead of unhooking the cloth bag he straightened up with a third pistol clenched in his fist. Jim Hawker had closed up and extended his left hand to receive the plunder; but at this fresh threat he leaned forward instinctively and grasped the weapon by its stubby barrel. For a moment they wrestled, the highwayman striving to keep the muzzle of the weapon pointing away from his body. Then his opponent's grip slipped and the ball discharged into the air.

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Gentleman Jim sat back in his saddle, panting. "That was a scurvy trick! Let's have the goods this time."

The valuables changed hands and the two horsemen continued along the darkening highway. Jim Hawker was considering the best way to dispose of his prisoner when an idea came to him and he smiled grimly.

They reached Polryn, by nightfall, riding openly down the cobbled street. Passing through the centre of the village they came at length to the Golden Mace. The highwayman escorted Cobby to the door opening on to the yard. He rapped without dismounting: Jeremy answered his summons.

"Is your father around, lad?" the highwayman enquired.

"That he is, sir. Shall I fetch him?"

"Do that, will you?"

Presently the massive innkeeper appeared. "Why have you come here, Jim?" he said in a hoarse whisper. "An' who's that wi' ye? Cobby Jenks as I live!"

"Hold this here barker, Ab.," replied Gentleman Jim.

Abednigo took the pistol and covered the sullen Cobby.

"'Tis a long story," the highwayman continued. "I knew the beadle was laid up or I shouldn't ha' risked coming. Let's get indoors and lock this feller up: then I'll tell you all about it."

Jeremy stabled the two horses and rubbed them down whilst the innkeeper locked Cobby Jenks in an outhouse, first gagging him and binding his arms to discourage any attempt to escape. Then Abednigo and the highwayman retired to the kitchen to discuss the latter's plan.

As Jeremy returned from the stable he heard the now familiar tapping of the beadle's stick on the floor above, so he hastened upstairs to see what was required.

Mr. Tittleton was sitting up in the four-poster bed, his dam-

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aged cranium swathed in bandages. His snuff box lay at hand on a table, along with a jug of warm punch.

"Where's my supper?" he demanded as Jeremy entered the apartment.

"Won't be long, sir."

"Was that someone enquiring for me at the door just now?"

"No, sir—just an acquaintance of Father's." Jeremy had no intention of informing against a friend of Abednigo's, even if he was a highwayman and worse.

"Strange that no one has reported seeing that rascal Jim Hawker! Curse this dizziness that keeps me abed!" Wincing from the violence of his emotions, the beadle leaned back against the pillow.

"Well, bring my supper as soon . . ." He was cut short by a pounding of feet on the stairs and Abednigo's excited entrance.

"Excuse me blunderin' in on ye, sir—but he's caught!"

"Caught? Who's caught?" rasped the beadle, irritated by this intrusion.

"Why, Gentleman Jim Hawker! Took on the Penzance road not an hour since."

"What!" The beadle shot up the bed. "Where is he now?"

"In one o' my outhouses, beggin' yer pardon. He'll lie safe enough till ye're ready to collect him."

"And who took him, d'ye say?"

"A friend o' mine, ridin' from Prestwyn. Come on him holdin' up the London coach, he said. Pulled his barkers and took him by surprise."

"Where is this friend of yours?" asked the beadle. "Bring him up immediately!"

Abednigo fidgeted. "He wouldn't wait. I told him ye'd want to speak wi' him. Said he was only too pleased to do his bit to—"

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wards preservin' law an' order, an' that he'd call to collect the reward money later on."

"And Hawker's safely locked up, ye say?"

"Aye. He'll bide nicely till ye're ready for him."

At this point Bessie called up the stairs to say that the beadle's repast was ready; and that the customers in the tap were growing weary of waiting to be served: so Abednigo bowed himself out, leaving Jeremy to attend to the beadle's inner man.

Jim Hawker sat at his ease in the kitchen. "How did he take it?" he asked when Abednigo could spare a moment from the business of the inn.

"He swallowed it, all right," the innkeeper returned gleefully. "But what's to do when he can get about an' wants to see him for himself?"

"That's a problem," the highwayman agreed. "Cobby Jenks don't look a bit like me—not so handsome by half. I must admit I hadn't thought of that."

They fell to considering ways and means; but the problem was solved in an unexpected fashion when Jeremy appeared with a message from the beadle.

"Mr. Tittleton wants to know if you can get a man from the tap to ride into Bodmin with a letter. He says he doesn't think he'll feel well enough to take the prisoner into custody himself. The letter is to the beadle there, asking him to collect the prisoner tomorrow."

Gentleman Jim and the innkeeper exchanged glances.

"Aye," declared Abednigo, "tell him to write his letter. I'll have it delivered for him—right to London if need be!"

"There you are, Jim," he continued as Jeremy mounted the stairs. "That's the answer. He's takin' it for granted it's the right feller. You'll be able to take it easy now."

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Jim Hawker nodded and pushed his tankard across the table top.

"That I will—draw me another measure, will ye?"

Jeremy informed the invalid that his wishes in respect of the letter could be accommodated, and provided him with quill, ink and paper. Then he returned to the kitchen, where his father was briefing a lanky individual named Sam Potter to undertake the journey. "Saddle Browny will ye, Jeremy," he requested. "She's the best nag for the job. An' see ye don't lame her," he added to the cadaverous Potter, "else ye'll get no more free beer in this house."

Jeremy took a lanthorn and quitted the inn by the yard door. He had crossed to the stable and set the lanthorn down on the stones to open the heavy doors (which had been roughly repaired since the previous evening's brawl) when he heard a soft padding of feet behind him. Thinking it to be Potter, he placed a hand on the latch. But as he did so a musty cloak dropped down over his head and his arms were grasped from behind. Then something weighty crashed down on his head and he knew no more.

Jeremy Goes Missing

ABEDNIGO went out at length to see what was keeping his son. He found the lanthorn by the door of the stable; but no trace of the boy. Mystified, he despatched Potter with the beadle's letter and continued to search unavailingly. "Drat the lad!" he muttered, "where can he ha' got to?"

But as the evening wore away with still no sign of Jeremy the innkeeper's feelings changed from annoyance to anxiety. Something untoward had occurred, that was plain—but what? He racked his brain for some solution to the mystery but none occurred to him. Finally he went to bed, determined on searching the village and, if need be, the surrounding countryside, on the following morning.

The innkeeper was astir at daybreak and was about to set off on his quest when an urchin from the village handed him a folded and sealed paper, saying that he had been given it by a cove in the main street, together with a fourpenny piece and instructions to place the missive in the hands of Tregowan the publican and no other.

Abednigo stared at the letter. He recognised his own name on the outside, but as his reading power extended no farther he returned to the kitchen of the inn, where sat Jim Hawker, who

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had taken advantage of the beadle's indisposition to spend a night between sheets.

Breaking the seal, the highwayman spelled out the message that lay within. "'Abednigo,'" he read. "'We have got yore boy. He stays here till you have got Patch and the others free. If they don't show up afor today week you won't see him agen.'"

Abednigo sprang to his feet. "So that's their lay, is it?" he stormed. "I didn't think even Patch's mob could stoop so low."

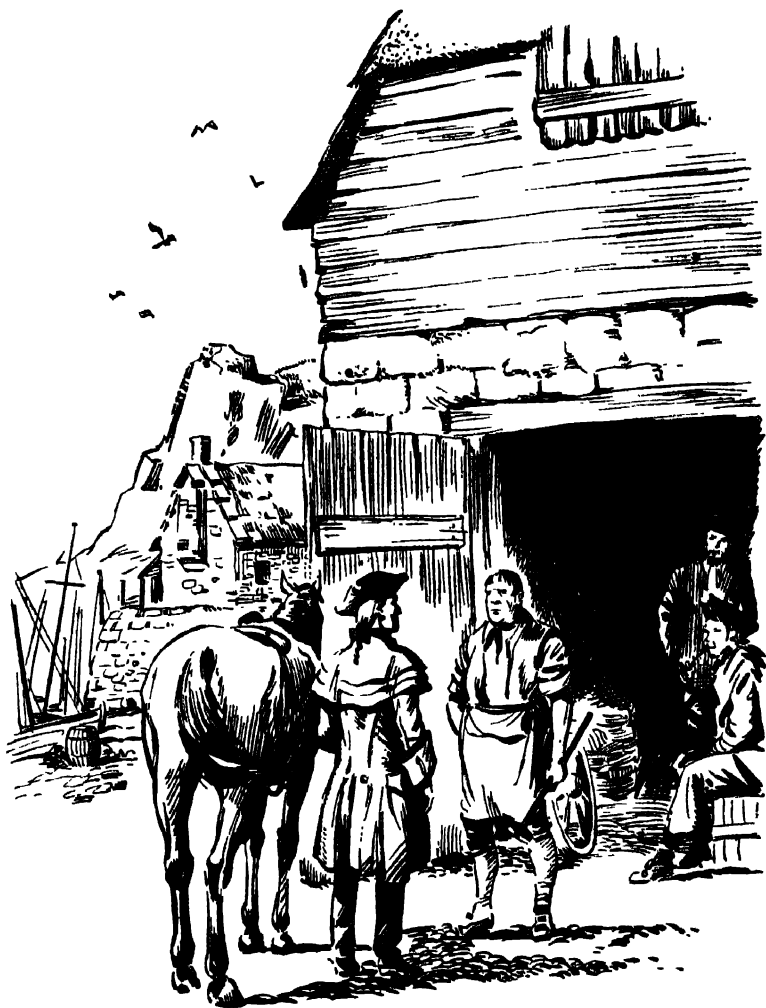
"Do you know their hideout?" the highwayman asked.

"Aye—an' for that very reason they ain't likely to take Jeremy there. 'Tis 'ahind John Crowther's smithy. He's one o' Patch's men who escaped with no more than a bruise or so the other night. 'Tis he an' a few more thought up this devilry! An' if they see as much as a hair o' my hide nearabouts they'll slit the lad's throat for sure."

"They don't know *me*, Ab.," said Jim Hawker. "I'll take a look around and see if I can discover where they have him hid."

That afternoon Jim Hawker rode Prestwyn way. His path led along the cliff top where he had met Abednigo. It was a fine, breezy day, the sky dotted with fluffy clouds; and the wind bore the scent of weed and brine to his nostrils. Presently he saw a great house, set back some distance from the cliffs, its windows staring out across the open sea. This was Craven Hall, the home of Lord Craven, the local squire. A few minutes more brought him to Prestwyn, the houses doggedly clinging to the shelving slopes of the cliff face. The path widened and was transformed into the village street.

John Crowther's smithy was a long low building of granite with tiny blackened windows. The doors at he front were



Gaffrey

"Good day to you."

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standing wide open and the smith himself could be seen, clad in a rough shirt and leather apron, plying his hammer within. Three or four other men were seated on a settle beside the forge fire, puffing away at clay pipes. When they saw the approaching stranger they fell silent, staring curiously as he dismounted.

"Good day to you," said Jim Hawker. "A loose shoe on the left forefoot. Can you see to it for me?"

"Aye," grunted the smith, laying his hammer down to examine Tony's hoof. "'Tis but a small job. An' ye'll wait a moment I'll set it to rights. Ye're a stranger, sir. Passin' through?"

"Aye. Passing through," replied Gentleman Jim, his eyes taking in every part of the smithy. "A tidy little village, Prestwyn."

"There's some as say they'd bide nowhere else."

The smith was a tall, heavily built man with a fire-reddened complexion, further marred by streaks of soot. There was something about his gaze that branded him as not the most open of men—a suspicion of shiftiness in the glances he cast at his cronies on the settle and his customer. The seated men were a mixed bag, and it was not difficult to picture any one of them in the role of smuggler. They returned the highwayman's stare with affected stolidity, puffing out wreaths of smoke.

The smithy itself was crammed with lumber; worn-out ploughshares, parts of waggon wheels, horseshoes, chunks of iron and many other things, all encrusted with a film of sooty grime. There was a loft, for a ceiling of worn boards hid the peaked rafters from view. It might be there the Prestwyn smugglers held their secret conclaves!

"There you are, sir," said the smith, straightening up. "That will be three pence, if you please."

JEREMY GOES MISSING

Jim Hawker handed over the requisite number of coins. "Can you tell me where I may find a man by the name of Patch Henderson?" he added casually.

The smith's eyes flickered and there was a barely perceptible pause before he replied.

"Aye: his cottage lies down the road a piece. But I know he is from home at present. What might be your business with Mr. Henderson, if I might make so bold?"

"A private matter," the highwayman returned, "and if—as you tell me—he is from home, then it must bide till another day. Perhaps you would show me his house, so that I may call upon him when I'm in these parts again."

Jim Hawker swung a leg over Tony's back, conscious of the several pairs of eyes that were boring into his spine. John Crowther gestured with his hammer to a tumbledown shanty, set back from the road on the seaward side.

"There be Micah Henderson's dwelling. A lobster catcher he be—if 'tis lobsters ye're after."

The highwayman made towards the hovel in question, wondering if he had said too much. He had aroused some unhealthy animosity, that was sure. He had learned very little, moreover, save the locality of Patch's dwelling. Having come this far, he decided to knock at the door, as if in doubt of the smith's statement that the lobster catcher was abroad. Reining in his mount he rapped at the warped oaken planks.

There was no response, as he had anticipated. Jim Hawker was about to turn away when he became conscious of a slow, rhythmic tapping. He inclined his head. It was just possible that the sound was being caused by bound heels, thumping on a wooden floor. Surely they would not have hidden the lad in so obvious a place! Then he noticed a coil of ancient rope, swing-

HIGHWAYMAN'S HOLIDAY

ing from a peg. The breeze was causing it to bump against the wall.

Out of the corner of his eye the highwayman observed that a man had stepped from the smithy into the road and was undisguisedly watching him. It would be tactless to stay longer. Accordingly he rode away, passing a dozen or so cottages and emerging into open heathland. What next? There was nothing to be gained from going farther. But he felt almost nervous at the prospect of repassing the smithy. He swung Tony round, however, and retraced his steps.

Two men were trudging along a short distance ahead. One was tall and the other short. They were dressed in seamen's jerseys and salt-stained breeches. The tall fellow had a wooden leg which imparted a queer rolling motion to his gait. Jim Hawker frowned; surely they hadn't been on the road when he had been travelling in the opposite direction! The short man was pushing a barrow, piled high with nets. There was something familiar about their appearance. Then Jim Hawker recollected Abednigo's description of Patch's cronies: the innkeeper had mentioned a man with one leg.

There was no houses this side of Prestwyn: where could they have come from? The highwayman slackened his pace, his eyes searching the ground on either side of the roadway.

He suddenly observed a dip on the seaward side of the road. The rough grass was trodden down at that point, and furrows caused by the recent passage of wheels were distinctly visible. The two men must have joined the road at that place. Something urged the highwayman to turn off and discover where the track led.

He dismounted and, leading Tony by the bridle, followed the circuitous track. Walls of rock soon hemmed him in on either

JEREMY GOES MISSING

hand. Wisps of tough marram grass grew on the hard-packed soil of the path. The highwayman came at length to the beach by the base of the cliffs, and, pausing, stared along the belt of white sand interspersed with pebbles. No one was in sight: the gulls, soaring and dipping and emitting harsh cries, were the only creatures to disturb the solitude. Green foam-flecked billows roared and surged between the jagged outcrops of granite and tiny pools filled with trailing wreaths of weed sparkled in the sunlight.

Several yards away to his right, Jim Hawker espied a tiny aperture in the face of the cliff. It was the mouth of a cave. He hitched Tony to a tongue of rock and entered its shade. After the first few yards the entrance broadened. There were footprints in the sandy floor. Not quite knowing what he expected to find, he advanced into the ever-widening recesses; the light faded and his feet crunched upon pebbles with a sound like breaking glass. On an impulse he shouted: "Jeremy!" The sound of his voice echoed in the confines of the cave and at the tail end of its reverberations there came the ghostly shadow of a reply.

Spurred into action, the highwayman tried to locate the position from which the answering voice had come. He called again, but this time received no answer beyond a muffled sigh. He searched desperately, convinced that it had been Jeremy's voice he had heard, and that the boy lay injured. But there was little he could do without a light and at length he desisted.

Quitting the cave, Jim Hawker mounted the cliff path and, flinging himself upon the stallion's back, rode homewards to the Golden Mace at a stretching gallop.

Abednigo Moves too Late

"THAT'S the situation, Ab." Gentleman Jim leaned back in his chair as he concluded his narrative. "The lad was somewhere inside the cave; but it was dark and I couldn't discover where they'd hidden him. I'll ride that way again after dark and take a lanthorn with me."

"An' I'll muster the band and accompany ye," declared the innkeeper. "You might meet up wi' some o' Patch's crowd—'twouldn't do for ye to be alone if that happened. Are ye sure 'twas Jeremy's voice ye heard?"

"Positive—though the cry was faint enough in all conscience. No doubt they'd knocked him over the head and he'd not fully recovered."

"There'll be a few more heads cracked if I get within striking distance!" cried the innkeeper, crashing his fist on the table top. "Take a bite to eat, Jim, whilst I gather the band." Rising ponderously, Abednigo went out about this business.

Bessie did the highwayman proud as to supper: a rabbit pie, slices of cold beef and cheese, with a bottle of Rhenish wine (which had escaped Patch's notice on the night of the raid) to follow. Jim Hawker fell to with a will, and was in the midst of his repast when a somewhat wavering footfall sounded upon the

ABEDNIGO MOVES TOO LATE

stairs. Jim Hawker hesitated, his knife halfway to his mouth. It couldn't be Abednigo; he had gone out; and apart from Bessie, the few customers in the tap and the sickly beadle the house was empty.

"Landlord! Landlord, I say!"

It was the beadle's voice beyond doubt. A hand rattled the latch of the kitchen door. The highwayman scanned the room for a way of escape.

"Landlord!—perdition take the fellow!" the beadle continued.

The only way out of the kitchen was by way of the passage in which the beadle stood. Jim Hawker leaned across to where his coat hung upon a chair back and snatched his pistols.

"Landlord. . . . Ah, there you are, Bessie!" The latch was released. "I've been banging on the floor of my room for half an hour and no one came to see what was wanted. Where is that boy, Jeremy, by the way? I haven't set eyes on him since last night."

"Master Jeremy's away, sir, and Mr. Tregowan too, at the moment. What may I do for ye, sir?"

"'Tis long past my tea time."

"I'll see to it right away," Bessie promised.

"Hrmph!"

Jim Hawker heard the beadle stump back up the stairs and into his room. He sighed with relief. Bessie came into the kitchen.

"Oh, Mr. Hawker, sir! You was nearly caught then. You really shouldn't stay here, not with the beadle upstairs."

"Perhaps you're right," agreed the highwayman, shaken by his narrow escape. "I'll go out and see to Tony in a moment. We shall be gone most of the evening and you will have to manage

HIGHWAYMAN'S HOLIDAY

as best you can. With any luck, we shall have Jeremy with us when we return."

"Oh, I do hope so! Poor Master Jeremy. What can those brutes have done with him? I wish Mr. Tregowan would have naught to do with the smuggling, I do indeed!"

"Cheer up, Bessie! Many's the fine trinket you've come by from your master's hobby." Jim Hawker laid down his knife and fork. "'Twas a fine meal. I'll be off to the stable now. Mind you don't forget his highnesses's vittles!"

The highwayman had given the stallion a good grooming by the time Abednigo's men arrived. They assembled in the yard, breathing threats of what they would do to Patch's cronies when they laid hands on them.

The evening shadows were lengthening when they set off for Prestwyn. As there were not sufficient beasts to mount the company they went afoot, skirting the village by a circuitous route which took them across rough pasture land. Once clear of Polryn they rejoined the cliff path and arrived in Prestwyn without incident. The doors of John Crowther's smithy were locked, but rays of light showing through numerous cracks showed that all was not quiet within.

Gaining the track that led to the beach, Abednigo and his followers descended to the shore. The slowly beating surf gleamed like dull silver in the evening dusk.

"Ye say the boy's shut away somewhere inside," the innkeeper remarked. "This cave's well known to the folk round about. Surely someone would ha' stumbled on any secret place there might be afore now!"

"'Tis mighty well concealed," Jim Hawker retorted. "I searched about without setting eyes on anything suspicious—yet I'll swear I heard Jeremy's voice."

ABEDNIGO MOVES TOO LATE

Abednigo took out his tinder box and lighted the lanthorns. "Let's be about the job, then, an' see if we can find him."

They entered the cave. The candlelight was reflected from a myriad twinkling points of rock and their footsteps echoed eerily in the confined space. The men huddled together, awed by the solemn atmosphere. At the place where he had caught the fleeting echo of Jeremy's voice the highwayman called again but there came no reply.

Abednigo divided his band into parties and they scrambled about in search of some clue to the boy's situation: but their efforts were not attended by success. At length the searchers gave up their seemingly hopeless quest and gathered at the centre of the cave. Then it was that Mr. Catchpole, whose wiry frame was admirably suited to such a venture, called from a point high on the face of the cave wall that he had literally stumbled on a rope ladder, coiled on a narrow shelf of stone. A line was attached to it and reeved through a pulley, and a moment's further investigation brought to light the method of lowering the ladder to the floor of the cave.

This discovery put new life into the searchers: they crossed the cave and stared up at Ebenezer.

"A ladder, ye say—then let it down, man!" cried Abednigo.

Mr. Catchpole did so, announcing that he could now see a flight of steps hewn in the cave wall, leading still farther aloft. The little fisherman mounted this precarious stairway without waiting for reinforcements, and presently his excited shouts informed Abednigo and the rest of the band that he had located the Prestwryn smugglers' hideaway.

It was a small cave, entered by means of an aperture in the side of the parent cavern which was invisible from ground level.

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One at a time, the others climbed the rope ladder and the rock staircase and joined Ebenezer in this small compartment.

Several empty casks, together with odd lengths of rope and broken packing cases, were scattered about the floor. A candle end was affixed to a ledge of rock by its own fat. One whole side of the cave was filled with crates containing bottles packed in straw cocoops. Abednigo took one of these and drew the cork with a practised flick of the wrist. "Good stuff!" he pronounced, sniffing the pungent aroma and swallowing a mouthful.

"But where's the lad?" Jim Hawker reminded him.

Abednigo's face fell as he recalled the object of their search. Then: "Ye were right, Jim. The boy *was* here. Look at this!"

He bent and picked up a worn coin with a hole in it. "This be his property," the innkeeper added.

Ebenezer sidled up to his leader. "There's blood in this here corner, Ab.," he said gravely.

Abednigo and the highwayman crossed the cave and examined the dark streaks. "Aye," said the innkeeper. His voice choked with a sudden upsurge of anger. "Heaven help Patch an' his fellers if it's Jeremy's!"

It was a sorry group of men that wended its way homeward to the Golden Mace. Even the rich haul they were bearing upon their shoulders did not serve to cheer them. Hopes which had been raised high by the discovery of the secret cave had suffered a crushing blow at finding the prisoner gone—and the ominous stains on the cave floor hinted at violence. Leaving his men to stow the captured liquor, Abednigo and the highwayman crossed the yard to the door of the inn.

Thrusting the door wide with a petulant kick, the innkeeper went into the kitchen and flung his great body into a chair. Jim

ABEDNIGO MOVES TOO LATE

Hawker followed more slowly; but he too had seated himself before he realised that the room contained a visitor.

Mr. Robert Prescott, the Excise officer, was sitting rather stiffly before the fire. "Good evening, gentlemen," he said quietly.

"Why, Mr. Prescott!" gasped Abednigo. "What're ye doin' here?"

Gentleman Jim was wishing fervently that he had noticed the coastguard before entering the kitchen, and he half rose to his feet. But then he decided to face it out. Mr. Prescott was not directly concerned with forms of law-breaking other than those that infringed his own department's regulations, although there was the affair at Nod's Hollow to be considered.

But the Revenue man was not interested in Abednigo's companion, as his expression showed. He looked crushed, as if by some dreadful misfortune.

"I know that we do not see eye to eye on certain matters," he began, his eyes fixed on the innkeeper's rugged features, "but something occurred this evening that made me seek you out. My Meg has disappeared. She left the dame school as usual at four o'clock and has not been seen since." The Excise officer leaned forward and his face became more animated. "I heard that your boy has been missing since last night. Knowing them to be friends, I wondered if they might have gone off together on some madcap escapade. Then I received this note." He held out a paper very like the one Abednigo had in his wallet. "'Tis from those villains at Prestwyn. They have kidnapped her, and the letter states that I shall never see her again unless I let Patch Henderson and his friends go free."

"What you said about us not seeing eye to eye is true," Abednigo replied, "but there's some deeds I could never stoop to, an' this dirty game's one on 'em. They've got my lad, too. Took

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him in the yard. And wherever Jeremy is, there you'll find your Margaret, you can lay to that!"

The innkeeper went on to outline the events of the evening, mentioning the stains on the cave floor and his fears for Jeremy's well being, but omitting the small matter of the hidden contraband.

If Mr. Prescott was puzzled over the reasons underlying Jeremy's capture he did not say as much.

"Will ye not let Patch go free?" Abednigo asked. "He could always be took again . . ."

The Excise officer raised his hands and then let them fall to his sides in a helpless gesture. "I should be a ruined man if I did that. And why should we give in so easily! Let's put our heads together and devise some plan whereby we may outwit these devilish brutes. We have the best part of a week in which to act."

Abednigo and the Revenue officer talked far into the night, discussing one scheme only to discard it in favour of another; and it was not until the dawn light gleamed in the sky that Mr. Prescott quitted the kitchen of the Golden Mace and returned to his quarters by the harbour.

Here he was greeted by a distracted subordinate with the news that Patch and his followers had made good their escape some half-hour since.

Escape from the Smithy

JEREMY was feeling in poor shape. He was conscious, but only just so. A great bell was tolling in his head, and when he opened his eyes even the faint light which was filtering up from somewhere below was more than they could bear. A whole day had passed since he had been struck down in the tavern yard, but it might have been hours or weeks for all he could tell. Since the blow had fallen on his head all had been a confused nightmare. He could dimly recollect the ascent of a swaying ladder, thrown across brayny shoulders, and a period of darkness and silence during which a voice had called his name; nothing more. But now he was in another place; his back lay against a massive beam, and not cold stone. And he was no longer alone; a second trussed and huddled figure was propped against the beams close by.

As consciousness returned more fully he realised that he was in a loft. A vista of blackened rafters sloped away above his head with a glimpse of tiles between them. Several men were somewhere below, for a rumble of voices seeped up through the planks upon which he lay. He stared at his fellow prisoner. Two wide, frightened eyes looked back at him. He could see little of the face, for a scarf had been wound about it. Then he realised with a sense of shock that it was Meg Prescott!

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His hands were tightly bound behind his back and he could not move them. His ankles, too, were securely fastened, and all his extremities were numb and lifeless. He attempted to ease the gag from his mouth by scraping the back of his head against the beam; but the effort was unavailing. Meg! Why should she be here? Why was *he* here, for that matter? The boy thought as hard as he could. He had been standing by the stable door; that was the last thing he could remember clearly. From the way his head was aching he had been dealt a heavy blow—by whom?

There was a wide crack in the boards about two feet to his left; if he rolled over he might be able to get a glimpse of his captors. He smiled reassuringly at Meg, forgetting that she could see nothing of his expression, and twisted his aching body so that he fell on his side. By dint of wriggling he contrived to bring his face in line with the crack. He gazed down at the scene below.

Five men came within his range of vision—and suddenly he realised where he was: the Prestwyn smithy! There was the forge and the anvil; and the smith himself standing with one foot upon it. The other men were unknown to him.

The voices now reached his ears more plainly.

"But suppose he don't do it?" rumbled one.

"He will if he thinks aught o' the lad," replied a smallish fellow with rat-like features and a shining bald pate. "Abednigo ain't the man to stay his hand because o' a mite o' danger."

"That were a bright notion o' yours to get the girl, John," another added fawningly. "You're a clever 'un, master smith, an'—if truth be told—I'd as soon see you leader as Patch himself!"

The smith was moved by this compliment to produce a bottle, which, spurning the use of glasses, the company upended in turn. They were thus pleasantly engaged when a stranger

ESCAPE FROM THE SMITHY

entered the smithy. He was sadly out of breath and bursting with news.

"Someone's been pryin' at the cave, John! I went after that there case of brandy ye told me ter bring—an' the stuff's gone!"

Rounding upon the panting ruffian, the smith grabbed him so that his heels dangled. "What's that ye say?"

"All gone, I tell ye!" The fellow clawed at the hands holding him aloft. "Set me down, John!"

"'Tis that Tregowan feller, I'll warrant," said the smith more calmly. "Lucky for us we moved the brat here. An' the cave's empty, ye say? How could he ha' known where to look, I wonder?"

"All was shipshape when we come away," declared the rat-faced man.

"There was that cove this afternoon, though," interposed his one-legged neighbour. "Ridin' a horse, he was. But he was movin' away from the village. That was about four o'clock."

"There was a gent called here around that hour," mused the smith. "Asked a mort o' questions about Patch. Could he ha' seen you leavin' the cave, Ahab?"

"Not a chance," rat-face retorted. "We was well out o' sight below the cliff when he passed by."

"Well, 'tis one up for Abednigo, any road," said the smith. "A rare run o' luck we've struck an' no mistake! There's naught we can do tonight, in any case. I'm for some shut-eye."

The company dispersed, and the smith bolted the door after the last of them. Then he sought his own quarters, extinguishing the candle. Jeremy writhed into a sitting posture and applied his mind to the problem of getting free.

As he moved the tender spot on his head caught against something hard suspended from the beam behind him, and for a

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moment he felt sick and dizzy again and unable to move further. When he had regained control of himself he wondered whether the object might serve to sever his bonds. He raised his bound arms and fumbled at the beam and his numb fingers encountered a rough, metallic blade. It was a sickle! Suddenly it crashed to the floor. He pressed the rope swathing his wrists against the rusted edge and sawed frantically. The rope parted in no time at all.

His hands were free! He chafed them together and at length feeling returned to them, along with intense pain.

It was several minutes before the rope at his ankles parted and he was able to untie the rag bound about his face.

He crawled to where Meg lay and removed the scarf that prevented her from speaking.

"Meg! Are you all right?"

She gave a great shudder and then burst into tears. "Oh, Jeremy! I thought I should die! Where are we?"

"In John Crowther's loft—he's the Prestwyn smith. They've brought us here to try to force your uncle to release Patch Henderson and his mob. I overheard them talking. Can you move your hands?"

"Not for a minute."

"As soon as you can walk we must try to get away," he said as he fumbled with the rope at her ankles.

"But we can't see anything in the dark!"

"I know—but I remember where the trapdoor is. Once we get down to ground level we shall be all right; the doors of the smithy are bolted on the inside."

It was some while before Meg could move her hands and legs; but when at length the circulation was restored, Jeremy took her hand and they stepped across the floor of the loft in what the boy

ESCAPE FROM THE SMITHY

hoped was the direction of the trapdoor. At last he encountered the edge of the opening with his outstretched hand.

"Now to see if the ladder's in place," he whispered.

He opened the flap and felt around with one foot for the top rung of the ladder, but in every direction he encountered nothing but air. The ladder had been removed!

Jeremy squatted on his heels and wondered what to do. It would be dangerous to drop to the ground, for if he injured himself he would not be able to help Meg escape, and the noise would certainly bring the smith to see what was afoot.

"Stay where you are, Meg," he breathed.

He crawled around the cluttered floor of the loft in search of something that might assist his descent, and it was not long before his groping hands encountered a coil of rope. He made his way back to the trap door.

"I've got just the thing, Meg," he said, tying one end of the rope to a rafter. Dropping the slack of the line through the aperture, he put Meg's hands around the hairy strands.

"Hold on until I reach the bottom," he said; "then I'll jerk twice. You slide down then."

The boy eased his body into space, his legs wound around the rope. Lowering himself, he arrived at the smithy floor. He gave the signal and felt the movement of Meg's descent. Soon she was beside him in the dark. Hand in hand they crept towards the smithy doors.

Footsteps crunched on the gravel outside.

"Down!" Jeremy whispered, and they squeezed into a narrow space behind the forge. A knock sounded at the doors and presently the smith appeared, dressed in a nightshirt and bearing a candle.

"Who's that?" he called softly.

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"Open up—'tis Patch!" replied a gruff voice.

The smith fumbled with the bolts. "How did you get away?" he gasped to the shadowy figures waiting outside.

"Get the lanthorn lit," snapped the man who had first spoken, tramping in. "Hurry an' shut the doors, John!"

The lanthorn's light illumined the lowering features of Patch Henderson's band. They sat down on the settle and anything that came to hand.

"Fetch some hot water an' a bit o' cloth," said Patch. "Jim here's taken a ball in the leg."

Jeremy, peering over the stonework of the forge, saw that one of the men was being supported by his companions, and that his face was drawn with pain.

The smith fetched some linen and a can of steaming water. "I'll just blow up the fire," he said, and he crossed to the bellows to puff the smouldering embers of the fire into life.

Jeremy's heart came into his mouth. The smith's hairy arms were working away at the bellows no more than a foot above his head; and although he and Meg crouched low the smith could not escape seeing them if he turned his eyes that way.

"How did ye get free, Patch?" the smith repeated.

"'Twas sheer luck," replied that individual. "We was locked in the Customs House cell an' the only soul to come nigh was the cove who brought our vittles. I'd thought o' downin' him; but he had a spry look to him an' I didn't fancy bein' winged with the barker he kept stuck in his belt. Then, this very evenin' blow me if he don't go an' trip over a flagstone. We were on to him 'afore you could ha' said 'knife.' 'Twas plain sailin' after that."

When the wounded man's leg had been bound up, refreshment was provided. Then the matter of the hostages was raised.

ESCAPE FROM THE SMITHY

"An' they're in the loft, d'ye say?" said Patch, when the smith had given an account of his plan to free his leader.

"Aye—I meant to keep 'em till Thursday. As it is, we'd best see to 'em in the mornin'."

"There'll be no time for that. I shall have to get clear away 'afore daybreak. Prescott'll be on my heels mighty sharp an' this'll be one o' the first places he'll try. But you stay tight, Crowther. He can't prove nothing against you. The rest o' us'll get to the cave."

"That place has been spotted," the smith admitted reluctantly. "Tregowan an' his crowd went there searchin' for that boy o' his. They took everything when they left."

Patch's solitary eye gleamed. "Of all the infernal luck! How come he found out about it?"

"I can't say," the smith muttered, "'tis all a piece with the bad fortune we've had lately."

Patch squatted on the anvil and thought.

"There's only one thing for it," he declared. "I must away an' see the Shadow. He's the only one can get us out o' this mess. You others had better come wi' me. Remember, John—you ain't seen us!"

The bedraggled gang quitted the smithy. John Crowther extinguished the lanthorn and rebolted the doors; then he took himself back to bed.

The fugitives emerged from their refuge and darted to the smithy doors. Slipping the bolts, they padded away along the road, the night air fresh on their cheeks.

News for the Beadle

MR. TITTLETON was feeling decidedly better. The sun was shining cheerfully through the lattice and the diamond pattern it was throwing upon the opposite wall was not wavering as much as it had done on previous mornings. A blackbird perched in a nearby treetop was warbling sweetly, in tune with his pleasant frame of mind. The beadle nestled his grizzled head further into the pillows and reflected on the successful outcome of his quest. Gentleman Jim would be safely under lock and key in Bodmin jail by this time—and that fact could do nothing but enhance his prestige. Who knew what favours Justice Pumphreys might not lavish upon the captor of so notorious a criminal! Of course, the reward would have to be paid to the innkeeper's mysterious friend; there would be no avoiding that; but in the meantime he could relax and enjoy his convalescence.

Feet pattered on the stair and Bessie entered the room without the formality of knocking.

"Now, girl," began the beadle sternly.

"Oh, sir!" Bessie interrupted. "There's a gentleman to see you. In a real taking, he is."

Mr. Tittleton frowned majestically. "If it is the fellow come about his reward you may tell him to call later."

"No, sir—this is a gentleman in a red waistcoat. Says he must

NEWS FOR THE BEADLE

see you, real urgent. He said something about the man you sent in being the wrong one . . ."

The beadle shed his drowsiness. "Send him up, then—don't just stand there gaping!"

Bessie fled below stairs and presently ushered in a sharp-featured, spindle-shanked man with the red breast of a Bow Street law officer.

"Mr. Tittleton? I'll take a chair, sir."

He accepted his own invitation, eyeing the couched beadle's bound head as he did so.

"My name is Trunnion," he continued somewhat acidly. "Two days since, you sent a man to Bodmin on a charge of highway robbery."

The beadle nodded glumly. He had a growing conviction that something, somewhere, had gone awry.

"It is my duty to inform you that this man does not resemble the circulated description of James Hawker. You may care to note the following points." Mr. Trunnion produced a bulky note-book, and, opening it at a place marked by a pencil, began to read, his eyes darting from the written words to the beadle's troubled features.

"Height of said James Hawker," he began, "five feet eleven inches; height of prisoner, five feet six. Complexion of said Hawker, fresh; complexion of prisoner, sallow, with sundry pock marks. Colour of Hawker's eyes, blue; colour of prisoner's ditto, brown. Other discrepancies: prisoner lacking little finger of left hand; scar on right cheek. Lastly, prisoner swears to the name of Elijah Jenks."

The Bow Street officer snapped his note book shut, pocketed it and sat back on his chair, his fingertips resting on either knee. "I might add, however," he continued in a slightly less frigid tone,

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"that the fellow is a wanted man in his own right. There is, in fact, a price of fifty guineas on his head."

To the beadle the interview had taken on a nightmarish quality. What could have gone wrong? He supposed that he should have gone down to examine the fellow for himself before despatching him to Bodmin. But why was this man from Bow Street so interested?

"I regret the mistake most heartily," Mr. Tittleton said. "I must own to some negligence in failing to ensure that the fellow answered to Hawker's description—but surely you have not come down from London solely on that account!"

The law officer leaned forward confidentially. "Indeed not. My purpose here is to investigate a project to wreck the *Bristol Merchant*, a ship due to pass through these waters in a fortnight's time. She is from Jamaica and has been docked in Cork, an Irish seaport, with a sprung mainmast these several weeks."

Mr. Trunnion lowered his waspish voice a tone. "I have heard in the strictest confidence that she carries a load of gold bars. As you may know, my department does not concern itself with the running of contraband; but wrecking does come within our jurisdiction. Now; this James Hawker is involved in this affair. He knows the nature of the *Bristol Merchant's* cargo; that much is sure. So you will understand my interest in his reported capture."

The beadle attempted to take this in. "But surely a highwayman would know little of such matters as wrecking!" he protested.

"Quite right: there are other brains than his behind this undertaking. Precisely whose they are is what I am here to find out."

The law officer picked up his hat and moved towards the door.

NEWS FOR THE BEADLE

"I wish you good day, sir, and a speedy recovery. Perhaps you will confine your attention to the ordering of your parish in future and leave the work of catching criminals to those who have the necessary knowledge and experience."

The beadle, once more alone, lay and reflected upon this change in the complexion of affairs. He had been deeply hurt by the law officer's parting remark, and wished that he had explained by what authority, he had been despatched upon his mission. Justice Pumphreys was a shrewd judge of men; one of the few who appreciated the true worth of Truro's beadle. Surely the mere mention of his name . . . But in spite of all the beadle said to himself by way of reassurance, and though the sun still shone from a cloudless sky, the day did not now seem half so fine.

Abednigo and Jim Hawker sat in the kitchen of the Golden Mace, discussing the events of the previous night over a glass of ale. They had been informed of Patch's escape and were wondering how this would affect the plight of Jeremy and Meg.

"I say we ought to take a look at Crowther's smithy," grunted the innkeeper. "I feel sure that's where they've stowed the youngsters."

"They may decide to let them go now that Patch is free," remarked Jim Hawker.

Abednigo scowled. "Make an end of 'em, more like. An' there's that to be thought on if we pay 'em a visit. 'Twill ha' to be done sudden like—take 'em by surprise so there's no time to do mischief."

"Tonight would be as good a time as any," the highwayman reflected.

"Aye; I'll make the arrangements. We'll let Mr. Prescott know, so that he can join us if he wants to. By the way, Jim,

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you'd best make yourself scarce now that the beadle's perkin' up. Once he's about again ye won't be safe here. I wonder that Bow Street chap didn't spot who ye are."

"I'll take myself back to the cave," said the highwayman regretfully. "'Tis a pity; I'd just got used to sleeping between sheets."

The beadle chose that moment to knock for hot water and a towel, and as this might mean that he was intending to rise, Abednigo hustled the highwayman out of the kitchen.

Collecting his mount, Jim Hawker rode away in the direction of Tor Point.

At nine of the clock that evening, Abednigo's band, augmented by a squad of Mr. Prescott's Revenue men, moved off towards Prestwyn. The smugglers were far from easy in the company of their hereditary foes; indeed, despite Abednigo's explanations, several of them were convinced that the Excise men meant to play them false at the first opportunity. And they could not credit their eyes when they saw the trim figure of their arch enemy, Mr. Prescott, striding along beside their huge leader. Jim Hawker joined the company at Nod's Hollow, and as they went they discussed how best they might tackle their quarry.

A lamp was burning in the smithy. Abednigo and Mr. Prescott stationed their men around the building and then advanced towards the big doors. They paused and listened. A low growl of talk reached their ears. Abednigo put his eye to a crack in one of the doors. Through it he could see the backs of three men seated against the forge fire. John Crowther was lounging against one wall, his face thrown into relief by the dancing flames. The crack was narrow and the innkeeper's view correspondingly limited.

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Were Patch and the others within—or had they already made their escape?

"What d'ye think? Shall we burst in on 'em?" grunted Abednigo.

"It will do no harm," the Revenue officer decided. "If the birds have flown we can at least discover what these beauties know of their doings."

They retired to the road and informed the company of this decision. Then the party advanced in strength against the smithy.

Mr. Prescott thundered on the door with his pistol butt. There was a stir within; then—surprisingly—the door was opened and John Crowther appeared, staring at the shadowy figures that hemmed him in upon all sides.

"What d'ye want?" he exclaimed. "If it's a shoeing job . . ."

"You know well 'tis nothing of the sort," snapped the Revenue officer. "We are seeking Patch Henderson and have reason to believe that he is hidden in your smithy."

"If 'tis Micah Henderson ye want, he lives down the road a piece—as I told yon gent t'other day." The smith glowered suspiciously at Jim Hawker.

"We'll take a look around, in any case," Mr. Prescott continued. "We know you're a member of Patch's band. Perhaps you, or one of these other gentry, can give us some information."

"Don't ye try pokin' yer noses into my smithy." John Crowther's tone was belligerent. "Ahab! Eli! Give a hand to shut the door."

The men by the fire leaped to their feet and hastened to the smith's aid. Abednigo, realising that it was their intention to shut themselves in, put his great shoulder to the thick timbers and, with a mighty heave which swept the smith clear off his feet, threw the door wide. The invaders swept into the smithy,

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smiting with irresistible ardour. The fight could only end one way, and soon the four fellows were safely held.

"Now," said Mr. Prescott, panting from his exertions, "where's Patch?"

The smith made no reply beyond a muttered imprecation.

Abednigo took him by the shirt. "Kidnap my son, would ye! Answer Mr. Prescott!"

"I'll tell ye naught," snarled the smith. "As for your brat; he got clear last night, the girl along with him."

"Where are they now?" the Revenue officer demanded.

"At the bottom o' the sea for all I care." The smith's voice died away in a paroxysm of choking as the innkeeper rattled his bones.

"Where are they? Answer now or I'll . . ." The smith, large as he was, was as helpless as a babe in Abednigo's grasp.

"I tell ye, I don't know! When Patch got free there was no point in keepin' 'em longer, so when they escaped we didn't bother to follow 'em. They ought to ha' found their way home by now."

"Well they ain't!" snarled Abednigo. "What's more, Crowther, you'll live to rue the day you thought up that plan if aught has happened to 'em."

Abednigo tossed the stricken smith to the ground and turned to Mr. Prescott. "What'll we do now? Neither Patch nor the children are here."

The Revenue officer sent his men to search the loft and the smith's living quarters. They returned to report that, apart from Mrs. Crowther, who had set upon them with a saucepan, not a soul was housed within the smithy.

"We've drawn blank," Mr. Prescott muttered. He rounded on the smith. "For the last time: where's Patch Henderson?"

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"I've told ye; I don't know," the fellow snarled. "He came here last night; but, knowin' ye'd come seekin' him, he took himself and his pals off. He didn't say where he was bound, only that I was to wait till I heard from him."

The Excise officer turned on his heel and, together with Abednigo, quitted the smithy.

"There's someone else behind this," Mr. Prescott said as they moved away. "Patch has gone to earth. He's not on his old stamping ground. Who would be most likely to conceal him? Why; the man who organises the smuggling in these parts—the man who tells *you*, Abednigo, when a cargo is due and relieves you of the goods after they're landed." He stopped and turned to face the innkeeper. "Now, Ab., who is it?"

"If it wasn't for your niece an' my boy I'd say naught," the innkeeper replied reluctantly. "As it is, the little I can tell won't help. I only know him as the 'Shadow'; an' I tell you straight, I haven't a clue beyond that to his identity. I get my orders by carrier pigeon. You've seen my birds. Where the messages come from I don't know, though judging by how fresh they are when they arrive, t'isn't so many miles away. If Patch knows who the Shadow is then he knows a sight more than I do."

"I shan't take advantage of what you have just told me," the Revenue officer returned. "I, too, have heard of this Shadow. 'Tis a fitting name for the rogue: it would be easier to grasp a shadow than the miscreant who lurks behind that name."

"Be that as it may," said Abednigo; "we're still no further forward. Where can Jeremy and Meg be? Why haven't they come home? 'Tis four and twenty hours since they made their escape. Something tells me we shall find 'em when we find Patch, neither sooner nor later."

Prisoners Again

JEREMY and Meg trudged towards Polryn. Although the moon was up, the road was shadowed by trees. Passing the darkened windows of the small cottages, they arrived at the beginning of the cliff path. This led them high above the beach and the sea, and the great spread of moorland reaching back to the tors on the landward side. The night air had revived their spirits. They were free and homeward bound. They quickened their pace.

"'Twas a mean trick to take us prisoner," Meg said.

"Aye; things might have gone badly for us if Patch hadn't shown up when he did," Jeremy agreed. "I wonder my father did not discover where we were hidden and make some shift to release us. It would seem that we were taken to force your uncle to free the Prestwyn gang. But they escaped on their own account, by what Patch said in the smithy."

Meg clutched at her companion's sleeve. "Can you see those men? 'Tis Patch's gang, I think."

Jeremy stared along the moonlit clifftop. Dark shadows were bobbing ahead, showing plainly for an instant as they crested a rise, only to vanish as they descended into a hollow.

"That's Patch all right," he said at length. "Why is he going this way? He said he was off to see the Shadow—whoever that

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may be, and there are no houses before you come to Polryn. Only Craven Hall, that is."

"Lord Craven's mansion!" exclaimed Meg. "His lordship can have no connection with the smugglers. Why, he's a great gentleman!"

"They must be going on to Polryn, then," Jeremy replied.

For several minutes they trailed the ghostly figures, slowly gaining ground until they were only a short distance to the rear. Then, all at once, the smugglers disappeared as completely as if the ground had swallowed them.

"Stop a second, Meg," Jeremy whispered.

Patch and his followers must have turned inland for the cliff was high at this point and there was no easy way down to the beach. Craven Hall loomed upon their left, dark and forbidding in the half-light. It was hard to imagine Lord Craven and his score of servants slumbering behind that high brick façade. But perhaps that was not the case—especially if Patch was headed in that direction.

"Come on, Meg," said Jeremy. "They must be making for the house after all."

After they had gone a few yards they reached a spot where a rough track branched off inland.

The boy paused.

"Come on, Jeremy! Let's hurry home."

"I'm going to follow Patch," said Jeremy decisively. "I might find out something of importance. If the Shadow lives at Craven Hall, then it can only be Lord Craven himself. Think what news that would be to take to your uncle!"

Jeremy, as always, had his way with Meg, and they followed in the smugglers' footsteps. The boy was quivering with excitement. Lord Craven! It seemed impossible that he should be

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involved in so rough and underhand a business. Jeremy had seen him at times, passing through the village in his coach, and once he had opened a gate for his lordship when he had been hunting with some of his fashionable friends. My Lord was not popular with the common folk; he was too haughty by far, scarcely deigning to acknowledge the salutes they gave him. The whole of Polryn came within his demesne and it was hard lines for those who fell behind with their rent or who dared to ask for some needful repair. Times had not been so hard in his father's day, for the old lord had been a just and kindly man. When he died his eldest son had succeeded to the title and for a space all had continued as before. Then, one night, the new lord had disappeared in mysterious circumstances. He had been riding home from a dinner party, ending his journey by way of the cliff path. His horse had been discovered the following morning with its neck broken, near to the cliff edge. There had been no sign of its rider, and it was presumed at the inquiry that the mare had tripped and fallen, tossing his lordship to the stony strand below. The sea rose clear to the foot of the cliff at high water and the court had assumed that his body had been washed away. Thus it was that the present Lord Craven had taken the title—a ne'er-do-well second son who had spent the greater part of his time abroad until fortune had brought him to the inheritance.

The narrow track led Jeremy and Meg across gorse-studded heathland to a row of tall trees that marked the boundary of the Hall park. They moved more stealthily as they approached the great house, completing the journey upon hands and knees. As they reached the trim garden with its neat paths and geometrically shaped flower beds, Meg implored her companion to turn back; but Jeremy was keyed to a pitch of great excitement by now and he brushed her entreaties aside.

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There was no sign of Patch and his company at the front of the house. Crawling through lines of shubbery, they arrived at a wrought-iron gate set in a high brick wall. Beyond this could be seen a light, winking from the rear of the Hall. Patch and his men were gathered around a door leading into the servants' quarters. An aged lackey stood on the threshold, a lighted candle wavering in his hand. He was clad in nightshirt and breeches and had obviously been summoned from his bed. They heard his high cracked tones as he remonstrated with Patch.

"I tell you I daren't disturb his lordship! He was playing picquet until after one o'clock and went to bed in a temper on account of losing sixty guineas to Viscount Spencer."

He made to close the door, but Patch thrust one foot into the opening.

"Hold hard, cully. Do as I tell ye an' rouse your master. Tell him 'tis Patch."

"Very well," said the retainer, "but if he brings his horsewhip with him don't blame me."

Presently Jeremy and Meg saw a light appear at one of the upper casements, and after a time Lord Craven appeared at the door, a loose robe thrown over his night clothes and his feet tucked into carpet slippers. His brow was as black as thunder.

"What is the meaning of this, Henderson?"

"Easy yer lordship, easy. I want a word wi' ye."

"How dare he speak like that?" Jeremy whispered. Lord Craven was renowned for his evil temper and would think nothing of whipping Patch all the way to Prestwyn.

The boy kept his eyes fixed to the doorway, expecting a scene to develop at any moment; but his lordship held his temper in check, and, surprisingly, after a further interchange of remarks, Patch and his followers were admitted to the house.

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"There's more to this than meets the eye," Jeremy said sagely.

They crawled to the sill of a window, now lit from within. Raising their heads, they were able to see into the room. A dresser hung with pewter pots and bowls stood opposite the window. Patch had seated himself on the edge of a massive table; his men cowered in the corner nearest the door, their hats clutched in nervous fingers. Lord Craven was staring at his unwelcome guests. His eyes glittered from deep pools of shadow.

"I told you never to come here without permission," he said, his harsh tones reaching the listeners outside by way of a loosely fitting window frame.

"This is a special occasion, by your leave, sir," retorted Patch, who seemed indifferent to his lordship's anger. "Me an' my mates ha' dropped into a spot o' trouble and need somewhere to hide. I've served yer lordship well in the past, and besides, there's that other matter I needn't remind you of, 'atween us. I've kept a still tongue on that score these several years—but if I was to think ye'd turn us away . . ."

Lord Craven's face convulsed and his hands opened and closed but he retained his self control by an effort.

"I heard you were taken by the Revenue men—and not even with your own swag, at that," snarled Lord Craven. "I should remind you that, as all smuggled goods find their way to me in the end, I see no reason for your senseless rivalry with Tregowan. I should have seen that you were discharged on some pretext or other when, as Justice of the Peace, you were brought before me. As it is you will have to go into hiding. I would send you to London if it wasn't for that affair in the offing. I suppose you will have to remain here."

He turned to Patch's quivering subordinates. "You men must breathe no word of this to anyone, you understand? Only your

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leader knew the secret of the Shadow's identity until tonight. Henderson should never have brought you here. But now that you are in my house I will save your worthless skins for you. In return you must forget who I am, and, through Patch, serve me faithfully in the future."

"We understand, your lordship," they chorused, knuckling their foreheads.

"Very well. Johnson will find you beds."

Lord Craven turned on his heel to leave the room, but one of the ruffians stepped forward respectfully. "Beggin' yer pardon, m'lud; but there be someone a-watchin' through the windy."

The Shadow spun round, his eyes darting to where the faces of Jeremy and Meg showed, round eyed, at the window. "After them!" he shouted, making for the door.

The eavesdroppers bolted for the shelter of the hedge flanking the vegetable plot and threw themselves into its foliage. Heedless of the needle-sharp brambles and trailing strands of ivy, they tried to force a way through this obstruction. But the hedge was dense and the task an impossible one.

"This way, Meg!" Jeremy gasped, and pulling his companion after him, he pelted along the line of bushes, seeking a way out of the garden. After an age he came to the iron gate; flinging it open he made for the cover of a grove of trees.

Lord Craven was hot on their track, closely followed by Patch and his men.

"Search the grounds!" his lordship shouted to the smugglers. "I'll fetch the dogs."

He reappeared in less than a minute, holding two great hounds in check. These sniffed the window ledge and then began to cast about for the scent of the fugitives.

Jeremy and Meg lay flat in the centre of the spinney, tremb-

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ling in terror. They had heard the baying of the hounds and knew that it could be only a question of time before they were discovered. Further flight was impossible, for a large expanse of open parkland lay upon the far side of the spinney. They heard their pursuers approach, gain the trees; then, with a shout of triumph, Patch bounded to where they lay.

"Here they be, yer lordship!" he bellowed, hauling Jeremy and Meg into the open.

Lord Craven approached, holding back the slavering hounds with difficulty.

"Children!" he exclaimed.

"I know who they be," Patch snarled. "Let's return to the house an' I'll explain."

The luckless pair were hauled across the garden and into the servants' hall, where they were ranged against the table and scrutinised by his lordship.

"The boy's Tregowan's lad," Patch explained. "As for the girl; she's the Excise officer's niece. Crowther kidnapped 'em to force Prescott's hand, but as things turned out, we escaped without that bein' needful. They must ha' got out of the smithy an' followed us."

Lord Craven eyed the captives with displeasure. "One thing is sure: they cannot be allowed to go free after what they have seen and heard. No one knows of my association with you, Henderson, and no one ever shall. They must be disposed of."

He crossed to a board fastened to the wall, upon which hung an assortment of keys. Taking down the largest of these, he turned to Patch.

"Bring them this way—we'll put them in the wine cellar for tonight."

Jeremy and Meg were hustled along a corridor and down a

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flight of narrow stairs. A stone arch faced them, through which an oaken door gave access to the cellar. Lord Craven turned the key in the lock and opened the door. The cellar was dark and dank, flanked with casks and long, bottle-filled racks.

"You need not trouble to tie them," his lordship continued; "they will never escape from this place."

Patch deposited the prisoners on a heap of straw and followed his master out. The door slammed and the key rasped in the lock. The patter of feet on the stairway was followed by utter silence.

Jeremy felt the dark pressing upon his eyes like a gloved hand. He turned to where his companion sat, invisible, beside him.

"I'm sorry, Meg," he said miserably. "We should have done as you said and gone straight to Polryn. But I did so want to follow Patch and learn what his game was."

"It's all right, Jeremy." Meg was trying to be brave, but her voice shook a little. "I wonder why Lord Craven let Patch speak to him as he did. There must be some reason to account for it."

"Patch knows something about his lordship," Jeremy agreed, "something that gives him a hold over him. I wonder what it can be . . ."

An Attempted Rescue

THE beadle sat in the parlour of the Golden Mace, awaiting the landlord. He had dressed and breakfasted shortly after the man from Bow Street had departed; but his enjoyment of the meal had been marred because of that harrowing interview. He ought to have realised that some knavery lay behind the reported capture of Jim Hawker. And how had Cobby Jenks come to be in the outhouse? The whole affair seemed to have got a trifle out of hand. Well, he would soon get to the bottom of the situation. Ah! here was Tregowan now.

"Good mornin', sir; pleased to see you about again."

The beadle returned this greeting shortly. "About this prisoner," he continued, "I'm told that he is not Jim Hawker but a wretch named Cobby Jenks."

"Ye don't say!" Abednigo appeared amazed.

"You must have read Hawker's description on the bills I had put up," snapped the beadle. "Nearly six feet in height—fresh complexioned."

"Well, sir; as to height, why, the fellow were carried into the outhouse, an' that don't register layin' down. An' as to complexion; 'twas night time and I didn't remark it."

"Who is this friend of yours that turned the fellow in?"

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"Why, a real good sort, sir. One o' the best; known him for years."

"His name, you blockhead!" The beadle forgot the need for diplomacy in his irritation.

Abednigo drew himself up. "I may be but a poor innkeeper, but I don't have to submit to bein' called names in my own parlour. If ye be dissatisfied with either the company or the quarters ye may pay your dues an' quit!"

Realising that his temper had betrayed him, the beadle changed his tone. "I assure you that I am most comfortable here, landlord, and grateful for the way you have attended me during my illness. That boy of yours has been particularly obliging. Where is he, by the way?"

Not by a hair's breadth did Abednigo reveal the true state of affairs. "I can't rightly tell, sir," he replied. "The young rip's taken himself off wi' Meg Prescott on some prank or other. They'll turn up shortly though, no doubt o' that."

"Meg Prescott—she's the Revenue officer's niece, is she not?"

"Aye, sir—pair o' harum scarums!"

The beadle, thwarted in his attempt to extract information from Abednigo, resolved to pay the Revenue officer a visit. Completing his toilet, he took hat and stick and ventured forth. It was a fine crisp autumn morning; the sun shone upon the dusty highway through the thinning leaves, white clouds sped overhead, driven by the breeze, and tiny wavelets danced upon the bright surface of the sea. Mr. Tittleton walked towards the village, followed by the admiring looks of women at their cottage doors, determined on seeking out the Customs office—and there it was, a trim white building hard by the quayside.

Mr. Prescott was seated at his desk, his cocked hat upended at his side, idly riffling through a sheaf of papers. He had found that

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he could not concentrate on his work for thoughts of Meg. Where could she be? Had he done the right thing in approaching Mr. Tregowan? The Revenue officer had been up half the night searching the coast in an attempt to recapture the escaped prisoners, but they had had half an hour's start and had gone to roost somewhere. Both the smithy and the cave at Prestwyn had provided no clue to their whereabouts—or to the identity of the Shadow, the man behind all the pother. Then there was the news brought by the Bow Street officer to consider. It was several months since a wrecking had taken place on his section of the coast. Somehow he would have to find the Shadow and put a stop to his evil machinations. He glanced up as he heard a tap at his office door. The Truro beadle! So he was out and about again.

"Good morning," said the beadle. "I had the pleasure of making your acquaintance a few days ago. I thought I would call on you."

"Pray be seated," returned Mr. Prescott. "What can I do for you?" He resolved to say nothing about Jim Hawker, or the hoax that had been played on the beadle. The less anyone knew about his association with Abednigo Tregowan the better.

The beadle accepted a chair. "You must have heard of the scandalous affair at the Golden Mace," he began. "A parcel of ruffians tried to force their way in in search of plunder. I was injured in the fracas and have only just recovered." Mr. Tittleton fondled his still tender cranium and acknowledged the Excise officer's solicitous remarks.

"Whilst I was abed," he continued, "the innkeeper reported that a friend of his had apprehended the very man I came to Polryn to arrest. Naturally, I was delighted. But I was in no state to take the fellow away myself, or to inspect him before he was collected, at my request, by the Bodmin officer. Now I am told

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that he is not the highwayman, Hawker, but a rascal answering to the name of Cobby Jenks!"

The beadle lowered his voice. "Tregowan assures me that he was unaware of the fellow's identity when he locked him in his outhouse—but I believe the innkeeper to be in league with Hawker! What is your opinion of the Golden Mace's landlord, Mr. Prescott?"

The Excise officer hesitated. If it had not been for his niece's disappearance and his subsequent alliance with Abednigo, he might have told the beadle what he knew regarding the innkeeper's smuggling activities; but as things were he would have to be evasive.

"Tregowan has kept the Golden Mace for many years," he said. "I find it hard to believe that he would take part in a deliberate deception such as you allege."

The beadle snorted. "That may be so, but I feel certain that he knows more than he will tell regarding the highwayman. You yourself have seen no one answering Hawker's description?"

"If I had I should feel it my duty to inform you," replied the Revenue officer with perfect truth.

With this, the beadle had to rest content, and after a further exchange of pleasantries he continued his walk. But the sense of frustration which had dogged him for days still hung heavily about him.

Jim Hawker had retired to his retreat at Tor Point, the inn being no longer safe now that the beadle was up and about. He was seated on a log which served for a stool in the cave, his back to the rock, turning over the problem of the children's disappearance in his mind. Jeremy, at least, had been in the shore cave at Prestwyn, and both he and the girl had spent a time in the smithy

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loft. But if Crowther had been telling the truth when he said that they had escaped, why had they not turned up at their respective homes? No: some fresh misfortune had overtaken them on the way to Polryn. Patch had vanished, too, along with the bulk of his men. Could there be a connection between these events?

Another matter came to his mind. The *Bristol Merchant*. Abednigo had not decided as yet if he was going to fall in with his suggestion. Jim Hawker could not understand why he found the plan repugnant. There need be no killing: the crew could be tied up and left on the beach. And there was no need for the innkeeper's part in the affair to become known—he and his men could wear scarves over their faces. There would be plenty of risk, certainly; but would not the acquisition of a fortune make up for that? Abednigo seemed to think that wrecking was not a business in which a self-respecting smuggler could engage. There was no accounting for his squeamishness, Jim Hawker decided.

A low-pitched murmur of voices obtruded upon his thoughts. He rose and crossed the cave to where Tony stood munching hay just inside the entrance. Parting the screen of bushes, he peered out.

A mounted man was standing beside a rock outcrop some dozen yards off. He was tall and elegantly dressed. A rough-looking customer in frayed coat and breeches was at his side.

"Yes, m'lud," this creature was saying, "'tis all arranged."

"Good!" The horseman's sharp features creased in a humourless smile. "They'll lie safe in Snyder's hands. Sending them to London will be better than slitting their throats. Murder has a way of coming to light, no matter how carefully arranged. What of the other affair?"

"The ship's due on the fifth, m'lud. I've arranged for the boat

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to be in position. She'll intercept if they come 'afore dusk an' ask for help. 'Twill be up to Patch and his crowd then. If she don't show up till after dark the other arrangement will stand."

"You have done well, Jem," remarked the rider.

The roughly dressed fellow slunk away towards the road and when he had watched him out of sight, the horseman applied his spurs and galloped away in the direction of Prestwyn.

Jim Hawker returned to his seat in the cave and thought over what he had overheard. The horseman was a person of quality, if his clothes were any indication. Whoever he was, he was holding the children, and they were to be sent to London. The stranger had known the present whereabouts of Patch, and was planning the destruction of the *Bristol Merchant*. He could be none other than the Shadow!

Abednigo would have to be told, the highwayman decided. But how was he to approach the Golden Mace with the beadle on the prowl? Perhaps he could change his appearance. He had no clothes other than those he was wearing, and the caped great-coat and tricorne hat would give him away instantly.

He stripped off his coat, untied his cravat and unbuttoned his long waistcoat. The cravat was retied around his neck in a slovenly manner and thus transformed into a neckerchief. Removing his wig, the highwayman daubed his neck and face with handfuls of earth, then, reluctantly, his breeches and waistcoat. There was no mirror in which he could observe the changes he had wrought in his appearance, but he felt very unlike his normal dapper self. Snatching up a hazel staff, he patted Tony and set off on his mission.

Once on the highway he made slouchingly towards Polryn. He decided that it would appear less suspicious if he kept to the open, and, sure enough, no one paid him the slightest heed as he

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trudged along, eyes fixed to the ruts furrowing the highway and shoulders hunched to conceal his height. He began almost to enjoy himself. Then the beadle hove into sight, mounted upon his mare.

There was only one thing to do; keep moving. Jim Hawker shambled on towards the inn, his stick tapping the ground rhythmically. As the beadle rode by he touched his forelock respectfully. Well, at least he knew that Mr. Tittleton was out, and that he could show his face at the Golden Mace with impunity.

He stamped into the parlour.

"What d'ye want?" Abednigo asked, eying the disreputable figure. "Why, Jim . . ."

"I've got news, Ab.," the highwayman said, straightening up.

The two men went into the parlour, where Jim Hawker related what he had overheard at Tor Point. "The mounted man must have been the Shadow," he concluded.

Abednigo rubbed his chin. "Smart clothes an' a bay mare. About how old, d'ye think?"

"Thirtyish."

"An' lean features?"

The highwayman nodded.

Abednigo dealt the table top a great blow. "'Tis him, all right! Lord Craven, by thunder! So he's the man I've been workin' for all this while."

"Lord Craven?" Jim Hawker echoed.

"Aye; Lord High an' Mighty himself! I can see it now. An' Patch is at Craven Hall! Jeremy an' Meg, too! But ye spoke o' London. Did he say when they was to be taken there?"

"No, only mentioned a name, Snyder. Doesn't bring anything to mind."

"We shall have to pay Lord Craven a visit when he ain't ex-

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pectin' callers," Abednigo decided. "As for that other business, I ain't surprised that Patch is mixed up in it. Nothing's too dirty for him to handle."

"But I don't see . . ." Jim Hawker was still puzzled as to the innkeeper's reasons for detesting the wrecking project.

"Nay, I know ye don't. But there ain't time to argue. Let's set ourselves to thinkin' how we can take a look into Craven Hall without his lordship knowin'."

The hands of Abednigo's turnip watch were centred on twelve when he and Jim Hawker, accompanied by Ebenezer Catchpole and a stalwart named Joe Pawle, entered the grounds of Lord Craven's mansion. Abednigo and the highwayman had spent a deal of time arguing over the best way to proceed. They had no knowledge of where the children were concealed, beyond that it was probably deep within the great house, either in the attics or the cellar. This was a long shot, and although the innkeeper would not admit it even to himself, the chance of effecting a rescue was slight indeed.

They halted by the privet hedge where Jeremy and Meg had sheltered the previous night.

"What now?" Jim Hawker asked.

"Try to get in round the back," grunted Abednigo.

The four men were well versed in the art of silent motion: they merged with the shadows and crept through the kitchen garden.

"Try one o' them windows, Eb.," the innkeeper instructed.

Ebenezer darted across the open space between the garden and the wall of the mansion and examined the tall windows. They were securely fastened, but this did not deter the little fisherman. Scrambling on to a sill, he levered at the window frame with a

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piece of iron which he produced from his pocket. The catch gave with a faint snap. He slid the window frame up as the others joined him.

"In we go," whispered Abednigo. "Be sharp, there's dogs about somewheres."

They were in the servants' hall. Abednigo struck a light. The flare of the tinder was reduced to a narrow beam of light as he lowered the case of the dark lanthorn.

"We'll try below stairs first," he decided. "Lift them keys, Jim."

The highwayman collected the keys from the board and they passed through the door leading to the hall. A graceful balustrade soared upward, bordering the stairs that led to the floors above. Behind this impressive flight of stairs a narrower, uncarpeted stairway led down to the cellar. Arriving at the foot, they looked around. Directly ahead stood a heavy door. It opened on to the wine cellar; that much they could see by peering through the grating.

"Try the keys, Jim," said Abednigo.

The fourth and largest key turned the wards: the highwayman heaved the door open.

"They bain't here, Ab.," whispered Ebenezer, when they had taken a look around, "but cast yer deadlights this way . . ."

He indicated a corner piled with straw bottle-covers. A pewter jug half-filled with water stood nearby, together with a chipped platter containing some half-eaten crusts.

"There's been two bodies lyin' there," the fisherman continued, "an' yon bread and water weren't put out for the rats. We've come too late; they was here, but they've been took away again!"

Mr. Snyder

JEREMY and Meg had spent a miserable day in the cellar of Craven Hall, crouched in the musty darkness. What was to be their fate? "Disposed of"—Lord Craven's words had sounded ominous. Again and again the boy blamed himself for the rash impulse which had resulted in their capture, though Meg had not uttered one word of reproach. Somehow he had to set her free. The heavy door barred escape by way of the stairs: the only other opening in the cellar walls—apart from the grating in the door—was a grille set high in one wall. When he had first set eyes on this he had been filled with hope, and setting one cask on another he had mounted till his face was level with the iron framework. But a cursory examination had shown that it offered no way of escape.

Bread and water had been thrust into the cellar at some time during the day; after that nothing had occurred to relieve the monotony of sitting in darkness. Then, as the light that showed at the grating began to fade, they heard once more the sound of approaching feet. Presently the door was opened and a man peered down into the gloom.

"Show yerselves!" the fellow shouted.

They rose and moved towards the steps. Catching sight of

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them, the fellow jerked his head. "Up the stairs," he snarled, "an' no tricks."

The man was wearing a coachman's heavy top coat. Lord Craven was standing at his side.

"Take them straight to Snyder," his lordship instructed. "Tell him to hold them at his place for a while, and say that I will send him further instructions in a day or two."

A carriage was standing at the front entrance of the Hall. It was a shabby equipage, but a pair of lively horses snorted and pawed at the traces, their breath steaming on the chilly air.

Jeremy and Meg were hustled inside and the door slammed and locked after them. The fellow in the long coat sprang on to the box and flicked the horses into motion. The carriage moved off at a smart pace. Jeremy, climbing on to the rear seat, saw Lord Craven turn and enter the house. Then the vehicle rounded a curve in the drive and Craven Hall was masked by a belt of trees.

After the darkness and seclusion of the cellar it was heartening to experience the brisk motion of the carriage and to watch the fading landscape fly past the murky windows, Jeremy thought. True, they were still prisoners—but surely they would find a chance to escape if only they were patient. But where were they bound? And Snyder, who was he?

The coachman's back was visible through the front window, and now and again he turned to see if all was well within the carriage. He kept the horses at a brisk canter, so that even if the boy could have forced the door it would have been dangerous to jump out. Lord Craven had not been guilty of carelessness when despatching his prisoners. All the windows were fastened and there was nothing with which to break them. Jeremy tried his

fist against the glass of the rear window, but only bruised his hand. The massive vehicle jolted and bounced as it quartered the highway, the horses' hooves throwing up great clouds of dust. They were on the London road, but Jeremy did not know that; he had never been farther afield than Truro before.

Jeremy and Meg were feeling pretty famished by this time; but the driver showed no signs of stopping, beyond pausing at a secluded spot to light the lamps. This done, he whipped up his charges and, swaying and creaking, the carriage continued Londonwards.

The whole of the night passed in this fashion. The children slept fitfully, forgetting the cold and their hunger for brief periods. The dawn revealed a barren stretch of road, flanked upon one hand by bronzed woodlands, and upon the other by broad fields of stubble.

At length the carriage halted by a wayside hedge-tavern, and the coachman shouted for the proprietor. A coarse-featured man in a filthy shirt and breeches appeared. He unhitched the spent and sweating horses and replaced them with a fresh pair, which he led out of a stable at the rear of the ramshackle hostelry. The coachman refreshed himself with a glass of ale and then unlocked the carriage door to admit a bowl of cabbage broth, a loaf of black bread and a pot of water, which the innkeeper provided.

As soon as these were consumed the carriage resumed its headlong progress, its inmates lolling on the hard seats, dazed with fatigue and no longer interested in the passing scenery.

After many hours of weary travel the carriage halted at a second shabby inn. The children were hauled into the road and hustled into a barn, where they collapsed upon some straw and instantly fell asleep.

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The journey was completed towards the evening of the following day. Houses became more numerous and the highway more populated with carts and coaches. The carriage turned into a side street, the wheels rattling upon cobblestones. Unkempt buildings reared up on either hand, the broken windows staring down like sightless eyes. Presently the carriage halted in front of a house even more disreputable than its neighbours. Leaping to the ground, the driver forced his way through a host of ragged guttersnipes which had gathered to gaze at the arrivals, and rapped upon a low door.

There followed a lengthy wait, during which time the coachman tried without success to disperse the continually growing throng. Then the door was opened by a doleful youth wearing a waistcoat several sizes too large for him.

The coachman turned and unlocked the carriage door. "Foller me," he growled.

There was no chance to make a run for it: the grubby urchins were pressing so closely upon all sides that a bid for freedom was impossible.

They passed into the house and found themselves in a dingy passage.

"This way, if you please," said the woebegone youth.

He led them several paces and then rapped discreetly at a door. A period of oppressive silence ensued; then a strange, piping voice bade them enter.

The apartment in which they now stood was illuminated by a lamp of burnished copper (the windows being heavily curtained). A rich carpet covered the broken boards. Pictures in gilded frames hung upon the walls, along with tapestries depicting hunting scenes.

At the centre of this magnificence, like a spider at the

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vortex of its web, sat a wizened man. He peered at the children from the depths of a wing-backed chair through pebble-lensed spectacles.

"Come in do, my dears," he said, and a hand all bony knuckles in the lamplight beckoned enticingly.

The coachman urged his charges forward and Jeremy and Meg stared at the weird creature. His head was a bald, shining dome,



fringed with wings of grey hair: his nose was long and pointed and it divided his craggy features like a mountain range. The fingers of his bony hands writhed upon the chair arms like pallid worms.

The coachman gave a letter into the clutch of those awful fingers. The old man broke the seal and scanned its contents, his seamed lips soundlessly mouthing the words.

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"Yes; yes indeed." Jeremy and Meg were closely scrutinised. "So you are to stay with us for a while. How pleasant it will be to have some young persons around the place again. Well; we must do all we can to make you comfortable, eh? Mike will take you to your room, and, ah yes, turn the key and bring it to me when you come down."

The peculiar youth led them out of the room, leaving Lord Craver's coachman closeted with their awful host. Jeremy's thoughts turned at once to flight; but a glance showed him that the front door had been locked and barred.

They mounted a flight of tottering stairs. Leading them along the passage that lay ahead, Mike halted at the end door. "Here's your place," he said, opening it.

A vista of rotting floorboards led their eyes to the truckle bed with its filthy straw palliasse. The walls of the room were papered, but years of damp and neglect had turned the paper into a mass of mouldering festoons which swayed in the draught from the broken window. Jeremy's gaze turned at once to this, but rusted bars were fitted into the aperture.

In his desperation, Jeremy thought of tackling the youth; but he was a head taller, and, despite his thinness, there was a certain stringiness about his build that hinted a wiry strength; and besides, there was the company downstairs to be considered. They would soon put in an appearance if they heard sounds of fighting. He meekly followed Meg into the grimy apartment.

The door slammed and the key turned in the lock. Meg collapsed on a chair which stood by the bed and Jeremy leant against the discoloured wall, a prey to despair. What was to become of them? Even if they contrived to escape how could they hope to undertake the journey to Polryn with neither money nor food?

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After some argument, Meg was persuaded to lie upon the bed, where, with no thought for its disgusting condition, she fell instantly asleep. Jeremy slumped upon the chair and contrived to dose fitfully.

Daylight was seeping through the broken window panes when the boy awoke. Although he was famished, his first thought was for his companion. He rose stiffly and crossed to the bed. ♣

"Meg," he whispered. "Wake up!"

Her eyes opened; but they clouded over as she remembered their situation.

"What shall we do, Jeremy?" she said. "I can't bear it here!"

Presently footsteps sounded in the passage and the door of their prison was opened. Mike entered with a tray. "Here's yer breakfast," he said drearily.

"Thank you," Jeremy replied, thinking that politeness might be repayed with information. "How long are we going to be locked in?"

"Don't know. I was shut in this room when I first come."

"Why was that?"

"Mr. Snyder thought I might not like it here. But he let me out after a while."

"What brought you here in the first place?" Jeremy enquired.

Mike leaned against the door post, the key of the room hanging from a finger. His pale eyes were swimming curiously in their sockets. He looked as if he had not eaten a good meal in years and his garments were little more than rags. Dreadful scars showed on his wrists.

"My father used to work for Mr. Snyder," he said. "When he got killed I was brought here to live. Found dead in an alley, he was; head almost cut off."

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"What about your mother?" Meg put in.

"Don't remember her. Mr. Snyder ain't nearly as kind as Father. But I like him well enough now. You're askin' a lot of questions. What you doing that for?"

He withdrew with a curious snake-like movement and closed the door.

Jeremy and Meg were eating their unappetising fare when a disturbance in the road outside attracted their attention. The boy heaved the bed towards the window, and climbing upon it, they looked out. A man had just left the house—or rather, had been thrown out, for he was in the act of brushing himself down. Shaking his fist at the closed door he turned and limped off along the road, heedless of the carts and barrows that crossed his path. Jeremy wondered what errand could have brought him to this strange house, and what quarrel he had had with its stranger inhabitants.

After that several hours passed uneventfully: then Mike reappeared with another meal. He laid the platter of bread and the bowls of soup on the bed without saying a word.

"Who was that making such a scene this morning?" asked Jeremy, for want of a better question.

Mike eyed him suspiciously. "Don't keep askin' me things. I mustn't tell ye anything. Just eat that soup and cause no trouble—then we'll be friends." For a moment Jeremy thought that he was going to cry. "I ain't never had no friends."

"We'll be your friends if you like," he said, hoping to win the pitiful creature's confidence.

"Will ye?" Mike's eyes lit up. "But no! I mustn't be friends wi' you, nor that girl. 'Take them their meals an' come straight out,' that's what Mr. Snyder said. I daren't disobey him."

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"Does he beat you?" Jeremy tried to lead the youth to further disclosures.

"Only when I've disobeyed him. But he don't like doing it—he's a kind man, you see. Besides—there's Jonah!"

"Who's Jonah?" Meg asked, staring at their jailer with a mixture of horror and fascination showing in her face.

Mike shuddered and his eyes swivelled. "He's Mr. Snyder's manservant. You haven't seen him yet, have you? He's cruel, not like his master."

Jeremy pointed to the youth's wrists. "Did he do that to you?"

Mike nodded. "One night when Mr. Snyder was out."

"Does your master go out often?"

"Oh, no—his clients usually come to visit him."

"That man this afternoon; was he one of Mr. Snyder's clients?"

"Yes. But he said he couldn't pay, so Jonah threw him out. Everyone must pay."

"So Mr. Snyder's a money lender!"

Mike began to nod, but then he checked himself. "Why am I telling you all this?"

"Because you would like us to be your friends," replied Jeremy. "And we want to be friends. You will let us, won't you?"

Mike's face became a study of conflicting emotions. "Yes," he said at length. "But Mr. Snyder won't like it."

"You needn't tell him." Jeremy's tone was wheedling. "We'll be secret friends."

The youth's face cleared. "Secret friends. Yes! Secret friends."

"And you'll tell us what we want to know?"

At once Jeremy realised that he had said the wrong thing.

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"I mustn't answer any questions—I've told you that afore!"

"But if we are to be friends you ought to help us," Jeremy persisted. "Friends *always* help one another. Besides, if we escaped from here you could come with us."

The lanky youth's features displayed a mixture of emotions, fear, excitement and agitation following swiftly one upon another.

"My father keeps a tavern, at Polryn in Cornwall," Jeremy added. "He would reward you handsomely when we returned to him."

"Would he go as far as five shillin'?" Mike enquired hesitantly. "Mr. Snyder ain't never allowed me money of my own."

"More likely he'd give you five guineas," Jeremy assured him. "And all you'd have to do is to forget to return that key you're holding . . ."

By this time both Jeremy and Meg were sure that their half-crazed jailer was enlisted on their side; but fate ordained an interruption to the conversation and the reverberations of a harsh voice rumbled in the well of the stairs:

"Mike! Come down this instant or I'll flay the hide off yer back!"

"That's Jonah!" the youth gasped. "I mustn't stay talkin' to you."

Snatching up the empty platters, he hurried out: they heard the key clatter in the lock and the squeal of its rusty wards. Jeremy seated himself dejectedly on the bed. His attempt to win their jailer's confidence had failed.

A Friend in Need

FOR several days Jeremy and Meg had to endure their imprisonment. Their only distraction was the appearance of Mike with trays of uninviting food. He made no reference to their previous conversation, but bore himself with scowling reticence. Many visitors came to the house, either afoot or in closed carriages, and they entered and left with the utmost stealth. Mr. Snyder's evil personality cast its spell upon the whole building, like the vapour of some dreadful plague. Jeremy felt sure that the half-crazed youth Mike owed his condition to his master's treatment. And Jonah, the manservant, whose ponderous prowling tread the children often heard, but whose face they had never seen, grew in the prisoners' minds into a fearsome monster. Jeremy was filled with concern for his companion. What she was suffering in this awful place he could tell by her wan looks, though she uttered no word of complaint. Then, one evening, Mike opened the door to bring in their evening meal, and Jeremy remarked at once that he looked more than usually unbalanced. His face was one great bruise, the lips so puffed that he could hardly speak.

"What has happened?" Jeremy asked wonderingly.

"Jonah did it," the battered wretch replied. "He said he hated the sight of me—they all do."

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"We're your friends, remember," Jeremy reminded him. "We'd help you if we could."

"No one can help me." There was a tinge of scorn in his tone. "You couldn't stand up to Jonah!"

"Has he been drinking?" Meg asked.

"He always drinks when the master's away. There's a man waiting to see Mr. Snyder when he gets back."

"I don't think Jonah's as bad as you say," Jeremy retorted. "Let me go and speak to him. Perhaps I can make him see that he has been wrong to treat you so roughly. You'd like to be on better terms, wouldn't you?"

"He won't listen to you," Mike sneered. "He won't be spoken to by anyone when he's been at the brandy. Mr. Snyder'd be angry if he knew that he'd been down to the cellar. There's lots of crates and things down there that have to be locked away."

"Let me try," Jeremy urged, eager to exploit this chance of quitting their prison.

Mike hesitated, then: "Come on, then," he said, laying a grimy finger to his lips.

Jeremy followed the gaunt creature along the passage and down the stairs. All was in darkness, except for a single spar of light that shone from an open door.

Mike grabbed Jeremy by the arm. "Look," he breathed.

The room was a kitchen, filthy and squalid like all the rest of the house excepting Mr. Snyder's apartment. A man was seated at the table that occupied the centre of the floor. Jeremy could not see his face, but his back was sufficiently alarming, for it was of prodigious breadth, wider even at the shoulders than his father's. Muscular arms lay upon the table top, a glass in one hairy paw and a bottle close to the other. Suddenly Jeremy was

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filled with terror. He dared not enter the room; he quailed at the thought of confronting so fearsome a creature. Yet what else could he do? Mike was hovering expectantly behind him, his twisted mind possessed with the notion that Jeremy could appeal to his enemy's better self.

Then the game was taken out of Jeremy's hands. Jonah was drunk; but he was not so far gone that he was oblivious to the slight sounds the two boys were making in the passage. He straightened up and turned.

Jeremy froze with horror. The head that reared from those massive shoulders had a blotched and pitted mask for a face, out of which two dark eyes like raisins peered towards the passageway. The mouth was a seamed and puckered gash.

"Who's there?" the hideous creature rasped, half rising from his chair. "Why, 'tis the boy from upstairs! How did ye get loose?" He raised his voice. "Mike! Show yerself! What's the meanin' of this?"

Mike moved forward a pace. "He's my friend. He's come to speak with you. He wants . . ."

"You fool!" Jonah made a grab at Jeremy. "What d'ye think Mr. Snyder will have to say to this?"

Footsteps sounded in the passage and a stranger appeared.

"What's all this?"

It was a youngish man, dressed in the height of fashion. His wide-skirted coat was a miracle of the tailor's art, and his snowy wig was tied with a bow of black ribbon. He was carrying an object which Jeremy had never seen before, a quizzing glass, mounted on an ebony handle. This he now raised to survey the brutish Jonah.

"What are you doing with this youngster, eh? I shall speak to your master about this; 'pon my word I shall."

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The newcomer's utter composure disconcerted Jonah, and he released his grip of Jeremy's shoulder.

"'Tis naught, sir," he muttered. "Go an' sit yerself down, m'lord. Mr. Snyder'll be back presently. Get yerself away upstairs, Mike, an' take this boy back to his room."

"Please help me, sir!" Jeremy gasped. "I'm a prisoner in this house, along with Meg upstairs. Help us to escape, I beg you!"

The quizzing glass swivelled in Jeremy's direction. "A prisoner, demme! And why are you a prisoner, may I ask?"

"I can't explain in a few words, sir; but please believe me. Mr. Snyder is keeping us here to oblige a friend of his. We know something they want kept a secret."

The dandy shrugged his shoulders. "My dear fellow, how can I help you? I can't afford to upset Snyder—too deep in his debt to do that. Eight hundred guineas, no less! But I'll mention the matter to him."

Jeremy's hopes were dashed. For all his fine plumes and ease of manner, this man was but another luckless fish caught in the toils of Mr. Snyder's extensive net.

"Yer pardon, m'lord," said Jonah. "I'll see these two upstairs myself."

The serving man pushed past the visitor and beckoned to the two boys, who perforce had to follow. The gentleman stepped aside to make room, and in doing so brushed against Jeremy. The boy felt something pressed into his hand, a coil of silken strands. The next moment he was following Jonah along the passage, the visitor's gift tucked into the top of his breeches.

Back in the room he examined his prize. It was a length of golden cord, at least ten yards of it. The gentleman must have

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purchased it earlier in the day for a label was attached to it, bearing a tailor's name and an address in Piccadilly. Jeremy admired the visitor's quickness of thought. No doubt he had been touched by the appeal for help and, knowing that there was nothing he could do, had parted with the only article he possessed which might be of use in an attempt to escape.

He discussed with Meg the best way of putting the cord to use. The window of their prison looked down upon the street, now fast disappearing with the fading daylight. A carriage was standing close to the house which most probably belonged to Mr. Snyder's visitor.

"That gentleman would help us if he could," Jeremy declared. "If we could climb out of that window and hide in the carriage I don't think he would give us away."

"But the window is barred," Meg protested.

"I know; but like everything else in the place, the frame is half rotten. We'll try to break out. We can be no worse off than we are now, whatever happens."

Jeremy crossed to the window. The evening shadows were closing in and the time was ideal for escape. He had not tried to loosen the bars before because of the drop beyond; but now they had the cord, things were different. The descent would still be dangerous, but fortunately Meg was the equal of any boy when it came to rope climbing.

The wood in which the bars were set was rotten, as Jeremy had remarked, and the window frame warped and seamed with cracks. Even so, strain as he might, the metal columns would not budge.

"A piece of this bedstead is loose," Meg told him. "If you pull hard just here it might break off."

Jeremy examined the bed. The cross member Meg indicated

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would make a good lever. He wrenched at it and it broke off with a splintering sound. Armed with this tool, he tackled the bars again, levering with all his might.

The bottom end of one bar gave slightly; then, with a great effort, he prised it free. Meg worked it backwards and forwards to free the other end while Jeremy set about its neighbour. Finally they succeeded in removing two bars and the way to freedom was clear.

"You aren't scared, Meg?" Jeremy asked. "It's a fair way down."

The girl shook her head.

Jeremy fastened one end of the cord to the remaining bar and pulled on it with all his strength. It seemed strong enough to bear their weight.

"As soon as you set foot to the ground, make for the carriage," he said. "We'll hide there till our friend comes out."

"But he won't be leaving until after Mr. Snyder returns."

"No; but even so it will be better than just wandering off down some side street. With neither money, food nor friends we shouldn't get very far—and Mr. Snyder will never guess that we are concealed so near his house."

He threw one leg across the sill and, grasping the cord, lowered himself out of the window. There was no one in the street to observe his antics as he eased himself down the wall, swayed for an awful moment and then dropped to the pavement. Seeing that Jeremy had gained the street, Meg followed. They darted towards the carriage.

Thanking Providence that there was no coachman, Jeremy opened the door and they scrambled into the stuffy interior. They reached this sanctuary only just in time for at that moment an ancient vehicle pulled by two bony nags rattled into view and

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stopped by the house door. Mr. Snyder alighted, fumbled for his key and passed inside. The runaways observed thankfully that he failed to notice the shattered window frame and the dangling, tell-tale cord.

Half an hour passed; then the door opened once again and the gentleman appeared. Pausing only to light the carriage lamps, he sprang into the driving seat and whipped up the horses. As they clattered away a mounted man trotted towards the house and drew rein. Jeremy thought there was something familiar about his appearance; but they had passed before he had the chance of a second look.

As they quitted the street a light sprang up in the prison room. Their escape had been discovered! But even as the door of Mr. Snyder's crumbling abode was thrown open they rounded the corner and passed into comparative safety.

"We've done it, Meg! We've got away!" Jeremy's voice cracked in his excitement.

"But who owns this carriage, and where are we bound?" Meg asked nervously.

"I don't know," the boy admitted. "But the gentleman was good enough to help us and I feel sure he'll do so again when he hears our story."

The carriage fled through darkened streets, past the glowing windows of coffee houses and the lowering outlines of mansions. Shadowy figures flitted in the narrow mouths of courts and alleyways, and now and again the flaring light of a link boy's torch cut a ruddy path through the gloom. At length the furious pace slackened and the equipage jostled to a stand outside a lofty building in a side street. The gentleman climbed down and shouted and an aged ostler hobbled out to hold the horses.

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"Don't bed 'em down, Roberts, I'll be needin' 'em again later."

"Sir!" Jeremy called softly. "Sir!"

The gentleman spun about, his astonished features illumined by the flaring carriage lamps.

"Please, sir—'tis us. The boy and girl from Mr. Snyder's. We climbed out of the window and hid in your carriage."

"Bless me! Come out, then, and show yourselves."

Jeremy and Meg stepped down to the pavement. The gentleman looked them over.

"So you contrived to escape after all! Oh, yes; I could see that you were telling the truth, my boy. But there was nothing I could say or do to help you then. Snyder's got his pincers on me. You'd best come inside, the pair of you."

They followed their new-found friend up the steps of the building and through the doors into a vast hall. Then came more steps and a lofty corridor. They halted at length by a door which opened on to a high and spacious room, panelled with darkly glowing oak.

A manservant silently appeared.

"Ah, there you are, m'lord. Don't forget your appointment with Lady Bussett!" As he spoke his eyes slithered from his master's face to the shabby waifs who stood gaping at the luxurious apartment.

"Lay out my cherry velvet coat, will you, Bootle—and see what you can find for our young visitors to eat."

Their host subsided into a chair. "Sit down," he said. "Tell me all about yourselves. I've an hour to spare."

As they devoured the tongue and cold chicken which Bootle brought in on a tray, Jeremy gave their new acquaintance an account of their hardships and adventures since they had been



The gentleman looked them over.

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kidnapped. He omitted no detail, not even their discovery of the Shadow's identity. When he mentioned Lord Craven a look of surprise passed over their host's expressive features.

"Well, well," he said when Jeremy had fallen silent. "It is a most remarkable tale. You will be anxious to return to Cornwall as soon as possible."

"It's vital that we tell Mr. Prescott our news as soon as may be," Jeremy said, "and our folks will be worried as to what has happened."

"I know Lord Craven well."

Jeremy felt a chill of anxiety trace the line of his back. If he had offended this gentleman there would be scant chance of his helping them.

"You do, sir? Then you will not credit what I have said regarding his association with smugglers."

"I'm not so sure . . ." The gentleman rubbed his chin. "He is a strange man; one, moreover, of unusual tastes and habits. Well, we shall see. My name, by the by, is Spencer—Viscount Spencer."

"Then you were staying at Craven Hall the night we were captured!" Jeremy exclaimed. "The footman mentioned your name—said that His Lordship had lost to you at cards."

"That's so—pity it wasn't enough to pay off Snyder."

"Didn't you hear anything unusual that night, sir? We were chased clear across the garden, and the hounds were baying."

"Not a thing," replied the viscount. "Craven Hall is a large place and my room was in the west wing."

He rose reluctantly. "I have to go out now. Bootle will fix you up with a hot bath apiece, and somewhere to sleep. I'll ponder on what you've told me and decide what's best to do."

Consulting an ormolu clock which ticked sedately on the man-

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tel, Viscount Spencer retired to his dressing room to array himself for his social call.

Jeremy and Meg, full and warm and comfortable for the first time in days, toasted their toes by the fire until Bootle appeared to say that the water for their baths was ready.

A half-hour later, as Jeremy crawled between the cool sheets, he thought over all that had happened. They had been extremely fortunate to encounter Viscount Spencer, he decided. In spite of his debts, he was plainly a person of substance and with his assistance their return to Polryn would be made easy. True, he was an acquaintance of Lord Craven; but from the way he had spoken it did not appear likely that they were close friends. Jeremy wondered whether there would be sufficient proof forthcoming to bring Lord Craven to justice. The unsupported word of two children would not be enough, that was certain. No; Mr. Prescott would not find it easy to bring his crimes into the open. Was not my lord a Justice of the Peace himself—and squire of a vast estate to boot! Then there was Snyder. There was a wily old fox who would not easily be trapped. Oh yes; there was much to do before they came to an end of their adventures.

Gentleman Jim Makes Enquiries

JIM HAWKER had ridden to London. It was not the first time he had visited the great city, for his chequered career had taken him far afield from his native town of Launceston. After his talk with Abednigo he had thought about the man Snyder, and although he had had no dealings with the unpleasant gentleman himself, and, indeed, knew nothing whatever about him, he had decided that he would be able to discover his whereabouts by enquiring amongst his friends of the High Toby. He had started off three days previously and covered the great distance as rapidly as possible. Once near to the City he made for the Pelican at Shooter's Hill, a notorious haunt of the fraternity. There were several familiar faces in the tap and he soon got into conversation with one, Josh Pritchard, who practised the same trade as himself.

"Gentleman Jim, as I live!" exclaimed that individual, a tall, lantern-jawed fellow in top boots and a leather coat. "Ain't seed you hereabouts for quite a while. Staying long?" He smiled grimly. "There's room for another tobyman in these parts—they hanged Ned Heathercliff last Thursday."

"I'm not here on business, Josh," replied Jim Hawker. "I'm on a kind of holiday, as you might say. Can I stand you a tot of rum?"

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"That's proper matey of you," Josh returned. "Things ain't too good just now, as a matter of fact. Too many busies around."

After a while Jim Hawker brought the conversation around to the man he had journeyed so far to seek.

"Sam Snyder! Mean to say ye've never heard of him?"

The highwayman shook his head.

Josh scraped the bowl of his clay pipe. "Why, he's just about the biggest fence in the business. Bought out Misery Martin, the bloke I used to deal with. You'd best watch your step if you have dealings with him. He's sharp as a razor—and as like to cut your throat. Lives in a house in a side street hard by the Fleet Prison—Ivy Lane, 'tis called, though I can't say as I ever noticed any ivy thereabouts."

"He's a big man, you say," said Jim Hawker thoughtfully.

"Biggest in the trade. Does money lendin' as well. Half the London gentry are on his books; lords an' dukes and I know not what!"

"Do you think he has aught to do with smuggling?"

"Shouldn't put it past him. Plenty of that goin' on at the docks. If there's money in it, then you may be sure Sam Snyder has at least one finger in the pie."

Jim Hawker drained his glass. "Thanks, Josh—where did you say he hangs out?"

"Ivy Lane, Blackfriars," the tobyman repeated. "Don't know his calling hours, an' I say again, be careful!"

The highwayman rode slowly through the darkening lanes until he reached the streets and houses of the City. The massive dome of Saint Paul's was looming over the rooftops as he came to the riverside and Blackfriars. He cast around for Ivy Lane and found it after a short search; a mean thoroughfare leading down

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to the river. As he entered the lane a coach went clattering past and an uproar broke out at a house several yards from the corner. The door was thrown wide and a shambling figure burst on to the pavement. "Stop that coach!" it bellowed; but the vehicle had turned the corner.

Jim Hawker joined the crowd that swiftly gathered.

"You, sir; did you notice if there was two children in that carriage that just passed?" The questioner's face was so dreadfully disfigured that the highwayman, who had seen many shocking things in his time, was obliged to shudder.

"No I didn't. Have you lost two?"

"Not really. Just a pair o' young scamps up to their tricks. Here on a visit, they are, an' they've stowed themselves away for a ride, the monkeys."

This was intriguing, the highwayman decided. If this house turned out to be Sam Snyder's lair then the missing children would be Jeremy and Meg. Then he espied the hanging cord and the damaged window and his suspicions were confirmed.

Jonah the footman, realising that his master would be angrier than ever if he caused a scene outside the house, retired and closed the door. The cord was hauled in and the window frame pulled into position.

Jim Hawker rode on slowly. If the children had indeed been inside the carriage he was too late to assist in their rescue. Somehow he had to learn their new destination and catch them before they landed into fresh trouble. But how was he to do that? The carriage had been quite an ordinary one from what he could recollect. If the problem of removing them from Snyder's clutches had been a thorny one, this was even more formidable. There was only one thing to do; continue with his original plan and call on Mr. Snyder.

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He turned his horse around and trotted back towards the forbidding door. The jangle of the bell roused echoes in the dank passageway.

"I wish to see Mr. Snyder," he said to the youth who opened to him.

"If you'll wait, I'll ask." Mike shuffled away, leaving the door on a short chain.

Presently he returned and unhooked the safety catch. "Come in," he said.

Mr. Hawker was conducted to the sumptuous room. Mr. Snyder was seated at his desk, his long fingers intertwined.

"Take a chair, sir," he said with an oily smile.

Jim Hawker sat down gingerly. "You are a man of business, I believe," he began.

"To what kind of business do you refer?" Mr. Snyder enquired cautiously.

"The business of disposing of valuables with no questions asked."

Mr. Snyder peered benignly over his spectacles. "My dear sir! Are you suggesting that I have any connection with the scoundrels who are known. I believe, as 'fences'?"

"Not in the least," the highwayman returned, "but I was recommended to you by a friend."

"His name?" The question came like the crack of a musket.

"That I can't say; but he's a customer of yours."

Mr. Snyder leaned back in his chair, his bald dome reflecting the light of the brass lamp. "And what if I can accommodate you? How shall I know that you will not betray me to the authorities?"

"Dog doesn't eat dog where I come from."

"Ah! And where may that be, I wonder. May I make so

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bold as to ask your name?" The craggy face looked incredibly sly.

"Jenks," Jim Hawker said with only the slightest hesitation. "Cobby Jenks."

"Well, Mr. er-Jenks. Suppose we leave things as they are until you have something to dispose of?"

The highwayman's brain revolved desperately. The interview appeared to be at an end, and he was no further forward. He could not bring himself to ask outright whose carriage it had been at the door. He rose to take his leave, glancing as he did so towards Mr. Snyder. The old man's eyes were as sharp as needles. No; he dared not risk it.

As the highwayman paused while Mike opened the street door the gruesome figure of the manservant shambled into view. "I trust you didn't mention those few words we had outside?" he murmured. "I shouldn't like the master to know I said aught o' them children being in Spencer's carriage."

"No, my good man; I did not."

What passed for a smile creased the lineaments of Jonah's face. "Thank ye, sir," he replied.

The door crashed shut behind the highwayman. What a stroke of luck! His visit had brought no results, but fate had tossed the information he required straight into his lap.

Jim Hawker swung his leg across Tony's back. Spencer. Now to find out who he was.

Josh Pritchard was still propping up the counter of the Pelican, engaged in dalliance with the landlord's daughter. Apparently his calling was not to take him abroad that night.

"I've been to see Mr. Snyder," the highwayman told him.

Josh whistled. "How did ye find the old varmint? Poorly, I hope!"

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"I'm on the lookout for another cove now; name of Spencer—runs a carriage."

"Spencer. There's a mort o' Spencers in London. Anythin' else to go on?"

Jim Hawker shook his head.

"Well; there's Eventide Spencer, the preacher—but it surely can't be him ye want. Then there's Septimus Spencer McGuffey, the prize fighter—but he don't usually travel so high class." The tobyman's features puckered as he racked his brains to think of further individuals of the same name.

"I have it!" he exclaimed presently. "Timothy Spencer, the goldsmith. He's a sly one—knows Snyder, too. Thick as thieves they are—beggin' yer pardon."

"Where does *he* live?" Jim Hawker enquired with mounting interest.

"Sun Lane, 'ahind Saint Paul's."

"Thanks again, Josh. I'll try him in the morning."

Jim Hawker rented a room at the Pelican for the night, and stabling for Tony, and as soon as he had eaten a bite of supper he went to bed. Early the following morning he set out to locate the goldsmith's shop. The streets were filled with the usual early morning procession of carts, bearing vegetables and greenstuffs to the market at Covent Garden. There were few passenger coaches about; but people afoot thronged the narrow thoroughfares, pushing and jostling good-humouredly. An apprentice indicated Mr. Spencer's establishment, a tiny house, its windows still shuttered, squeezed between identical neighbours. He summoned an urchin to hold Tony's head and mounted the worn steps to the door. There was a small grille in the top of this and when the reverberations of his lusty tattoo had died away two beady eyes appeared and scrutinised him from between the bars.

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"We ain't open. Come back after nine o'clock."

"My business can't wait," the highwayman said. "I wish to speak with Mr. Spencer."

Mumbling something impolite, the jeweller fumbled with the bolts that protected his property from law breakers, and the door swung creakingly open. The eyes belonged to a short, tubby man of about middle age. A nightcap was perched on the back of his bald head.

"Come in, then, if ye must," he grunted. "I'm Mr. Spencer; what d'ye want of me?"

The highwayman decided to come straight to the point. "I'm looking for two children," he began. "They were seen leaving Ivy Lane in a closed carriage, which, I was told, belonged to a Mr. Spencer."

The goldsmith flashed a suspicious glance at his visitor. "Ivy Lane. I know of it, and I have a carriage; but I know nothing of any children, and was not in that district yesterday evening. Good day!"

The fellow was doing his best to edge his unwelcome caller towards the door, so Jim Hawker retired. Tossing the urchin a coin, he mounted Tony and rode away.

He had to wait for most of the day before Josh appeared at the Pelican.

"Do I know any more Spencers?" The tobyman scratched his head. "Only Viscount Spencer, the nob. Most likely he owes Sam Snyder a guinea or two. You might try him. Hangs out in Boodle's Club, Saint James's Street. A fashionable establishment that does for the gentry. Has rooms there, him being single, y'see."

"Farewell, Josh. Let's hope 'tis the right fellow this time!"

The highwayman headed citywards once more. Boodle's Club

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was easily found. The evening was drawing in and the tall windows were ablaze with light. Assuming a bold front, he mounted the steps. The doors of the club were thrown open by a lackey as he approached.

"Good evening, sir." The fellow's tone was questioning.

"Does Viscount Spencer reside here?" Jim Hawker's tone held just the right amount of languid nobility.

"He does, sir; but he's out at present. Can I give 'im a message?"

The highwayman considered.

"No, thank you, my good fellow. I'm making enquiries about two missing children, and have reason to think that Viscount Spencer knows of their whereabouts. They are not here, I suppose?"

"Good gracious me, no, sir." The lackey's jowls wobbled at the thought.

"When do you go off duty?"

"At seven, sir."

"Then it is just possible that they were brought here last night."

"I suppose so—but it is against all the rules of the Club!"

Jim Hawker produced a guinea and held it delicately between thumb and forefinger. "Perhaps you could make sure . . ."

The lackey's eyes fixed greedily upon the coin. "Pray take a chair," he said.

The highwayman seated himself and waited. A page was sent scurrying off to the kitchen and presently a footman appeared. The flunkey took him aside and questioned him closely. When he approached Jim Hawker his expression gave some indication of his news.

"I've never heard of such a thing! His lordship brought two

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dirty little imps in along with him last night. I must remind Viscount Spencer of the rules, I really must!"

"Could I see them?"

"I'm afraid that is impossible, sir. I cannot enter the apartments without his lordship's permission, even if he has broken the rules."

"Thank you," Jim Hawker said, rising.

The flunkey coughed. "Birdwood mentioned that his lordship has arranged for the children to leave at eight o'clock tomorrow morning. He, ahem, overheard his lordship's instructions regarding his carriage."

The guinea, which had been on its way back to Jim Hawker's pocket, changed hands.

As he returned to the Pelican the highwayman mulled over what he had learned. At last he had caught up with Jeremy and Meg's will-o'-the-wisp progress. But where did Viscount Spencer come into all this? Could he be a friend of Lord Craven? It was more than likely! If that was so then he was most probably intending to deliver the children back into the hands of that villainous nobleman. That had to be prevented at all costs.

By the time he reached his destination his plan was made.

Viscount Spencer Takes a Tumble

JEREMY opened his eyes and gazed out of the tall window at a sky white with clouds. He stretched luxuriously. Meg and he had rested the whole of the previous day and now felt fit once more and ready for anything. Jeremy had fretted at first over the delay in starting for Polryn. Viscount Spencer had explained that, because of the business that had brought him to town, the journey could not be made at once. It had meant the loss of a day; but there remained a week before the *Bristol Merchant* was due to pass by the Cornish shore. His lordship had assured the boy that he could complete the distance in three days, which would give Mr. Prescott four days in which to complete his arrangements—whatever they might be.

There was a gentle tap at the door and Bootle entered.

"Now, young sir; up with you," he said. "I've called Miss Meg—and the master has been up for over an hour."

Jeremy washed with haste and went to the breakfast room. Meg was perched on a chair at the dining table; Viscount Spencer, ready dressed for the road, was seated at a writing desk.

"There you are," he said, glancing up. "Make a hearty breakfast. I don't intend to stop till we reach Basingstoke."

When they were ready to leave they descended to the entrance

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of the Club, running the gauntlet of the flunkey's disapproving star. The viscount's equipage had been brought round: Jeremy and Meg clambered inside while Viscount Spencer mounted to the box. It was his custom to drive himself, however lengthy the journey. The horses were fresh and itching to be on the road. At a twitch of the reins they sprang into motion and the carriage moved smartly away. None of its occupants observed the mounted figure which was shadowing them at a respectable distance.

They went by way of the Strand and the children stared in wonder at the great mansions which came into sight in stately procession as they quartered this fashionable thoroughfare. Viscount Spencer had his hands full with the horses, but now and again he turned and pointed out some of the landmarks. He showed them Somerset House, which housed the Royal Society and other learned bodies; the Turk's Head coffee house and many other haunts of fashionable society.

The boy could not help contrasting their present journey with the way in which he and Meg had entered the city. Then they had been tired and dirty and almost senseless with fatigue; but now, on this fresh morning, alert and revived in spirits, they gazed eagerly at everything.

The Strand merged into Fleet Street and then into Cheapside. Then a right-hand turn brought London Bridge into view. The carriage clattered beneath an arch and they were moving between a tightly packed mass of shops and houses supported above the broad river upon massive piers. Their pace was slower now on account of the traffic and the children stared wide eyed at the thronging crowds; clerks and sober merchants mingled with the representatives of a dozen trades, all intent upon their respective business. Soon they reached the southern bank of the river and at once the scene changed in character. The buildings here were

VISCOUNT SPENCER TAKES A TUMBLE

mean and squalid, bringing to mind the quarter in which Mr. Snyder lived. It was with a sense of relief that they gained Saint George's fields and more open country.

Viscount Spencer turned and smiled. "Lean back and enjoy the view," he said.

They did so, vastly preferring the broad fields and woodlands to the crowded turmoil of the city streets.

The Piebald Mare at Basingstoke was reached by early afternoon. Viscount Spencer arranged for a change of horses and then shepherded his charges into the parlour, where he ordered a large meal.

Their journey was swiftly resumed, it being his lordship's intention to pass the night at Salisbury.

They were making good progress and Jeremy and Meg, lulled by the dull rumble of the wheels and the steadily clapping hooves, fell into a half doze. Viscount Spencer, the road being clear and the horses settled to their task, hunched his head down into the collar of his driving coat. A lengthy drive lay ahead, with no suspicion of anything amiss; and what followed came as a complete surprise.

"Stand and deliver!"

His lordship jerked into wakefulness and stared along the road. "A cursed highwayman!" he muttered.

He heaved on the reins and as the horses slowed, fumbled for the pistol he always carried below the driving seat.

"Drop that!" The man in the wayside shadows raised his own weapon threateningly.

His lordship, seeing that he stood no chance, gave up his attempt to draw his firearm.

But he did not do so quickly enough to prevent his assailant firing a warning shot, which sped perilously close to his head. The

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report caused the still trotting nags to plunge and his lordship, caught unawares by the pull of the reins, was toppled to the highway, where he lay still and silent, a trickle of blood from his head staining the hard-packed earth.

The highwayman dismounted; and as he neared the carriage he was revealed to the children's staring eyes as Jim Hawker.

"Mr. Hawker! What are you doing here?" Jeremy stared at his would-be rescuer in perplexity.

"I've caught up with you at last!" gasped the highwayman. "Let's push off before that fellow comes round."

"But we can't leave him like that!" Meg exclaimed. "He's a friend, Viscount Spencer, and he was taking us home to Polryn!"

"A friend? Why, I never . . ."

The children explained.

Jim Hawker shook his head ruefully. "And I thought I was acting for the best. We'd better see if his lordship's much damaged!"

Jeremy and Meg leaped down to the road and the three of them approached the prostrate body. The highwayman felt for the viscount's pulse: it was beating but faintly, and his breathing was barely discernible.

Jim Hawker looked up, glum faced. "I'm truly sorry about this. We'll take him to Yeovil and get a doctor to look at him."

They lifted the inert body into the carriage. Meg took his lordship's head on her lap and wiped the blood away with a kerchief.

"I'll drive," the highwayman said. "Do you think you can manage Tony, Jeremy?"

The boy nodded.

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"Then up with you and let's get moving!" Jim Hawker helped Jeremy into the stallion's saddle, and, mounting to the box of the carriage, set the horses at a trot.

They reached Yeovil by nine o'clock. The highwayman pulled up at a coaching inn in the market square and, jumping down, made his way to the inn parlour.

"An accident!" The landlord was all concern. "You'll require Doctor Phillips. I'll send for him immediately. Bender!"

A small man in smock and leggings appeared in the doorway.

"Get down to the doctor's house," the landlord told him. "Now, sir, we'd better get your man to bed."

His lordship, who was now breathing more easily, was carried upstairs and put between sheets.

The carriage had been stowed away in the stables, and Tony bedded down, when the doctor appeared. He was a fat, bustling little man with square spectacles. "Where's the patient?" he enquired, rubbing his hands together.

Jim Hawker and the children followed the doctor upstairs and crowded in the bedroom doorway.

"Ah! Umhm!" exclaimed the tubby doctor as he bent over the insensible viscount. "A case of severe concussion," he announced. "Rest and quiet. Serious?" he added to the highwayman's muttered question. "Of course it's serious, my dear sir. There may be damage to the brain. But then, again, there may not. He may lie for a day or a week; there's no telling in these cases."

The party trooped downstairs.

"Your friend will have to stay here for the present," said Jim Hawker, when the doctor had departed. "I wish I hadn't thought to waylay the carriage! I'd decided that he was taking you back to Lord Craven, you see."

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"You were not to know, Mr. Hawker," Jeremy replied. "But our news can't wait till he's better."

"No, I suppose not." Jim Hawker rubbed his chin. "That villain, Lord Craven, must be brought to book—though 'tis a shame that so much gold should pass by unmolested!"

The highwayman went on to tell of the *Bristol Merchant*, and Lord Craven's plan to relieve her of her cargo of gold bars. "I asked your father, Jeremy, if he'd join me on that lay; but he didn't seem to be taken with the notion."

"Smuggling's one thing; wrecking's another," replied the boy indignantly. "Wrecking means cold-blooded murder!"

"But I explained that there need be no bloodshed!" Jim Hawker protested.

"You can't run a ship aground on a rocky beach without someone getting hurt," said Jeremy, wise to the ways of the coast. "Besides, wreckers always kill the crew of any vessel they lay hands on. Patch Henderson at Prestwyn could tell you that."

"I've heard my uncle speak of wreckers," added Meg. "They are feared and hated by every decent-minded man and woman in Cornwall."

"I suppose you're right," replied the highwayman, staring into the fire. "Well; I'm on the side of law and order now—at least, as far as this affair of the *Bristol Merchant* is concerned—and I'll tell Abednigo so as soon as I see him. But we have to decide what to do with your friend."

"We shall have to leave him," Jeremy said decisively. "He can't be moved, and we can't wait. Have you any money, Mr. Hawker?"

"I'm fairly flush; why?"

"Let's pay the landlord to look after him and go on at first light."

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"And when I've delivered you two safely at Polryn I can ride back to see how he's shaping," added the highwayman. "'Tis the least I can do, seeing I'm to blame for his accident."

They ate their supper and then retired, having arrived at a satisfactory arrangement with the landlord, who seemed an honest and kindly fellow. He agreed to give Viscount Spencer his best attention; and if he had any regrets as to the extra work this would entail, they were more than compensated for by the honour of entertaining so distinguished a person beneath his roof.

The three travellers set off at an early hour the following morning. They had decided to use his lordship's carriage, which Jim Hawker was to return when he re-visited the inn. The day was fine and they made good headway, and evening found them in Exeter in the county of Devon.

They stayed the night at a tavern in the main street and pressed on again as soon as it was light. Now they were in familiar country, the great spread of Dartmoor reminding them of their own wild land. All day the carriage clattered on through villages and hamlets and by five o'clock they reached Polryn and halted by the door of the Golden Mace. Jeremy and Meg decided that they had never set eyes on so welcome a sight.

Abednigo, emerging from the inn to discover what travellers the carriage had brought, was astonished to see Jim Hawker in the driving seat, his clothes white with dust, and Meg staring from the window. Then he noticed Jeremy astride the highwayman's stallion.

"So ye did it, then, Jim!" he shouted. "Come inside, all o' ye! Come inside!"

The highwayman clambered wearily to the ground; then he hesitated.

"Where's Mr. Tittleton?" he asked.

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"Ye needn't trouble yer head about him," the innkeeper assured him. "Inside with ye! Bessie; away to the kitchen, girl. Bustle about now!"

The servant girl, her face scarlet with excitement, dished up a capital meal; but as Abednigo was carving the side of beef he noticed Meg's expression.

"Why, bless me!" he exclaimed. "We've forgot Meg. Her uncle an' aunt must be told the news." Hurrying out, he sent a messenger hot-foot to Mr. Prescott's house.

It was a merry gathering. The innkeeper was as pleased to have his son home as the boy was to be there. During the meal Jeremy related all that had befallen Meg and himself since their disappearance, and his story had hardly begun when the Revenue officer arrived, breathless and excited, to see that his niece was indeed safely returned. He listened with intense interest to what Jeremy had to say regarding the *Bristol Merchant* and Lord Craven's scheme.

"I, too, have heard something of this plan," he remarked gravely. "News of the undertaking must have leaked out some while back. That law officer knows what is afoot, and will doubtless remain in the area until either the attempt has been made or the ship is safely docked."

Mr. Prescott stared at Gentleman Jim. "He told me that a certain highwayman was aware of the nature of the vessel's cargo, and that he had ridden to Polryn to try to interest his friends in the venture." The Excise officer leaned forward in his chair. "I must be frank with you, Mr. Hawker. I'm torn two ways. While it is my plain duty to turn you over to the authorities, I cannot forget the great service you have rendered my niece."

Abednigo broke the ensuing silence.

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"I won't try to gammon you that this isn't the one and only Gentleman Jim, Mr. Prescott; nor that he didn't brook this wreckin' scheme to me some weeks ago: but I ask you to believe that neither of us would stoop to so dirty a game. Jim here don't realise—as you an' I do—what wreckin' entails. No, sir. If you have a plan to spike the Shadow's guns, then you can count on Jim an' me to do all we can to help—ain't that so, Jim?"

The highwayman nodded. "I must own I was keen on the notion to begin with; but what with Abednigo being dead set against it, and then this business of Meg and Jeremy, why, the boot's on the other foot with a vengeance. What's more, I'll tell you how I came to hear of the *Bristol Merchant* in the first place. I had to lie up for a bit in Truro some while back, and the cove I took shelter with knew all that was news in the smuggling line—wrecking, too, for that matter. Tony often had to share his stall with a whole mountain of smuggled goods, but my friend was a fly customer and the preventive men never caught up with him that I know of."

"Mr. Hawker told Meg and me that he was against the wreckers," Jeremy put in. "Please, Mr. Prescott, at least give him a chance to get clear before you take action!"

The Excise officer looked stern for a moment; then his face relaxed. "Believe me, Mr. Hawker," he said. "I'm more grateful than I can say for what you have done to help Meg. If you're willing to help me thwart the Shadow, I will, in return, say nothing of your presence here to either the beadle or the law officer, and here's my hand on it."

"That's kind of you, sir." Jim Hawker clasped Mr. Prescott's hand. Then he turned to Abednigo. "You mentioned that the beadle was out. What is he up to nowadays?"

The innkeeper smiled broadly. "He's been kept busy enough.

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First he meets with a cove who says he's seen Gentleman Jim riding the highway at Prestwyn o' nights. That kept him occupied for several evenin's. Then someone reports seein' his quarry away up on Longmoor. One way an' another, he ain't had a deal o' time to sit around since you went to London. That reward started a deal o' red herrings—to say naught o' a mite o' help from me on the side."

"And the law officer?"

"I can tell you about him," said Mr. Prescott. "He's been hot after the Shadow, but with not an atom of luck so far. Patch and his cronies have vanished from the face of the earth, and there's been nothing doing by night since our last meeting. But now you bring us this news concerning Lord Craven, which, I confess, I find it hard to credit. He must be an exceedingly clever fellow to have kept his secret so well. But one thing is plain; we must foil his attempt to pillage the *Bristol Merchant*!" •

The Revenue officer turned to Jim Hawker. "Jeremy says you overheard the Shadow speaking to one of his confederates at Tor Point. What did he say?"

The highwayman repeated what he had heard.

"So there would appear to be two plans," Mr. Prescott remarked, "both laid for the fifth. Today is Tuesday the first of October. We have three clear days. The first scheme is to use a decoy boat, which will intercept the *Bristol Merchant* under the guise of seeking aid. Patch and his company will be concealed below hatches and will attempt to board her. That means they will have to use a fair-sized craft."

"Joshua Spragg's *Fair Maid*, most likely," said Abednigo. "Patch's lobster boat wouldn't be big enough by half."

The Revenue man nodded. "And if their quarry does not put in an appearance till after dark, what then?"

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"They didn't say," replied the highwayman.

"My notion is a false beacon at Reynold's Point. If they douse the light at Marrow Head, she'd run aground on the beach near to the shore cave at Prestwyn."

"But isn't there anything we can do now?" Jeremy exclaimed.

Mr. Prescott glanced smilingly at the boy's eager face. "I should think you've had enough excitement for awhile. No; we must lay our plans carefully. We want to take the whole lot at once. Moreover, we must implicate Lord Craven if that is at all possible. And you had best keep under cover, Jeremy. The Shadow is bound to hear of your escape sooner or later and when he does he will spare no pains to get you back into his clutches."

The Excise officer turned to Abednigo. "I will take Meg home now, if you have no objections. Her aunt will be eager to see her. I will visit you again later in the evening, if it is convenient."

"To be sure, sir," replied the innkeeper. "Come as soon as ye like. I've a fine bottle o' brandy I'd like ye to . . ." His face became a picture as he remembered to whom he was speaking.

Mr. Prescott smiled and shook his head in mock resignation. "So long as it comes from a decanter," he replied. "But believe me, Abednigo, once this affair is done with I shall be back on your trail again. Come, Meg."

The girl turned to Jeremy. "It seems as if I shall not be seeing so much of you for a day or two. Thank you, Jeremy, for all you've done. And you, too, Mr. Hawker. You will return to Yeovil and see how Viscount Spencer is faring?"

"I will, miss," the highwayman assured her.

When the door had closed on Mr. Prescott and his niece Abednigo glanced thoughtfully at Jim Hawker. "Where are we goin' to hide you, Jim?" he said.

"I'll do nicely at the cave."

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"That you won't," retorted the innkeeper, "for the beadle's on to it. He came back here yesterday afternoon, full o' his discovery. Still, I expect you'd like to stay an' see the end o' this business."

"I certainly should," the highwayman returned. "I'm no saint myself; but I'd dearly love to see that high and mighty Lord Craven get his deserts."

"There's another thing," said Abednigo. "We've a new boarder at the inn. Yon runner's taken the room next the beadle's!"

Jim Hawker whistled. "It'll be an experience to sleep under the same roof as a beadle and a law officer at one and the same time!"

The innkeeper's face brightened. "I have it; we'll bed ye down in the loft."

The highwayman laughed. "I've slept in many a worse place in my time, and been pleased to do it. I'll stay till Saturday, when all will be settled one way or another. Then I shall have to return to Yeovil. What about Viscount Spencer's carriage, by the way, and my Tony?"

Abednigo considered. "We can't keep 'em here. I'll have Ebenezer put 'em up at his place. He has a barn, and a meadow behind his cottage where the horses may graze without attractin' too much attention. Jeremy, show Mr. Hawker the loft, and find him some straw an' a blanket or two."

The Beadle Bagged

MR. TITTLETON was feeling a little more cheerful. For the past week he had been sent on one fool's errand after another in his zeal to track down James Hawker. "Find your man, but don't take him in," the law officer had said. "He may lead us to the Shadow." That was all very well; but where *was* the rogue? It seemed that every oaf in Cornwall had either set eyes on him or had some clue as to his whereabouts. But each and every lead had proved false when the beadle had followed it up—until yesterday, when he himself had stumbled upon the villain's lair, a cave high amongst the tors. There had been signs which told a tale to practised eyes such as his: the ashes of a fire, scraps of food, hay in a rough manger. Oh yes; the rogue he sought had lain there only a short while before—might even now be again in residence!

The beadle pushed back his wig and mopped his clammy forehead. He had almost reached the mouth of the cave, having left his horse tethered amidst a clump of furze some distance down the hillside. The climb, short as it had been, had robbed him of his wind—the fruits of being laid up a week, he told himself. Perhaps he might take a breather, here in the shade of this large rock. If the highwayman was indeed within the cave, what a

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piece of news that would be for Mr. Trunnion's ears. For, despite his high opinion of himself, the law officer had been no more successful in his quest than had the beadle.

"It is a wild country hereabouts," the beadle thought, "naught but crags and moorland and wind." And such a wind! It had found him out at that very moment, pushing into his body like a hand, whining amongst the tors which pricked the sky at his back. Mr. Tittleton longed to be back in the parlour of the Golden Mace, sipping hot punch and roasting his toes, free from the nagging worry of this tiresome search. If nothing came of this latest clue, he felt inclined to give up and return to Truro and his parish duties. But the law officer had requested his help—to say nothing of Justice Pumphreys! And there was a dogged streak in the comfort-loving beadle that made him loath to go home empty handed. After all, he said to himself, a week of his stay in Polryn had been spent abed; no one could count that when reckoning up the time he had given to the case.

Mr. Tittleton started. A mounted man was coming his way at a full gallop. He was still some way off, but the beadle could see that the horse was a chestnut—and yes; the rider was wearing a tricorne hat and a caped greatcoat!

He took out his pistol and examined the priming. Forgotten were the law officer's words of caution: the beadle intended to arrest his man and let all talk of wrecking and plots go hang!

The horseman was quite close now. He slowed his mount and, coming to the first of the boulders, reined in sharply and came to a stand. Mr. Tittleton's hopes faded. This man was not Gentleman Jim. Those craggy features did not fit in with what he knew of his quarry—and this gentleman was not living rough; his

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clothes were spotless and of the finest quality. No; it was foul luck again! Yet who was this man, and why should he pause at so lonely a spot, waiting so purposefully?

A second man now appeared, astride a shaggy pony, his legs reaching almost to the ground. He headed towards the stationary horseman.



"Afternoon, m'lud."

The beadle jumped. This, then, was a titled gentleman!

"What is this important news you bring?"

"That boy an' girl—they're back in Polryn!"

The questioner frowned. "That is impossible! They are in London—at Snyder's place."

"Then they must ha' got away, m'lud," the man persisted.

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"I've seen 'em with my own eyes. In a coach they were, and the driver was that highwayman feller."

The beadle pricked up his ears.

"If what you say is true they must be recaptured immediately!" snapped the horseman. "They know too much to be left at large. But doubtless they have already told their tale to Prescott, the tide waiter." The speaker's face twisted with anger. "But they have no proof; and who would credit the word of two urchins against that of a man of my position! No, on second thoughts, we will let them be. If they were to vanish again it would only serve to strengthen their tale. But someone has blundered! I shall have something to say to Samuel Snyder when next I see him. Get you back to the village, Jem. We will meet at the Hall tonight."

Who were these two? The beadle craned his neck to see the better. Surely the gentleman on horseback was Lord Craven. The other fellow was Jem Miller, the tanner. He was a Prestwyn man, and a friend of the missing Henderson! Mr. Trunnion would be interested in what he had just overheard. What had he said about Jim Hawker? That he had been driving a coach which had borne the children from London to the Golden Mace! He must waste no time in returning to the inn. Best not to disturb these two; they looked as if they were about to move off, anyway.

Sure enough, after a few more remarks, Jem Miller ambled off on his pony and Lord Craven—if it was he—applied his spurs and raced towards the sea.

The beadle emerged from behind the rock and scuttled down the rough slope. His mare was still standing between the furze bushes; climbing into the saddle, he turned the creature's head towards the Golden Mace.

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He rode straight to the stable, hoping to discover the highwayman's mount; but only Brownny and another mare stood within and they stared resentfully at the beadle's abrupt entrance.

Pushing his mount into the nearest stall, Mr. Tittleton hastened into the parlour. Abednigo was there, talking to Jeremy.

"Why, Mr. Tittleton!" said the innkeeper. "See who's here—my son's decided to come home at last. Been to his aunt's at Bodmin with not as much as a by your leave! I'll give him something to think on!"

"I have heard a different tale," said the beadle.

"What's that, sir?"

"I overheard two men talking, up by the tors. One was saying to the other that he had just seen your boy delivered to the inn in a carriage driven by Jim Hawker. What have you to say to that, Mr. Tregowan?"

"Why, that I can scarcely credit it, sir. True, the lad arrived in a carriage, Meg Prescott along with him. But I thought as how they'd picked up a ride. The carriage moved off as soon as they got out, and I was that eager to lay my hand to the boy's rump that I didn't remark the driver."

"And you would be able to identify neither carriage nor driver again, eh? You're always pat with an answer, landlord, but I shall have you yet. Is Mr. Trunnion returned?"

"No, sir, he's been out since first light, like yerself. I hope he won't be long in followin' you in; there's a fine game pie brown-in' in the oven."

The beadle's mouth watered, and, in spite of himself, his ire abated. The Golden Mace was a fine billet for food and Mr. Tittleton was a man with an eye to his stomach.

But first five and then six of the clock passed and still the law officer failed to put in an appearance. The beadle began to grow

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anxious. He knew that Mr. Trunnion had intended to spend the day nosing around Prestwyn. He might have run into a packet of trouble, in which case it was up to the beadle to get him out of it.

The game pie was brought in at last. When he had done justice to Bessie's cooking the beadle wondered what he had best do. He was full of good food and weary from his day in the open, and his inclination was to relax in front of the fire. But if the law officer was indeed in trouble then he would have to do something about it. Very reluctantly he informed Abednigo that business was once more to take him abroad.

"Looks like bein' a nasty night, sir," remarked the innkeeper.

And indeed it did, for when Mr. Tittleton, booted and spurred and muffled to the eyes in a heavy riding cloak, set foot outside the inn, it was to brave the stinging chill of a cold drizzle and the buffeting of the still rising wind. But his mettle was roused, and dragging his mare out of the stable he urged her towards the cliff path.

The night was dark and the way unfamiliar, and once upon the exposed cliff top the beadle came several times within inches of disaster. Blasts of wind tore at his cloak and roared through the threshing branches. His mare lost the path more than once and plodded dangerously near to the cliff edge. But fortune favoured the beadle, and after what seemed an age the lights of Prestwyn appeared ahead. Mr. Tittleton had passed through the village on his travels, but he could not remember much about the place. There was a smithy and an inn, the Ship. It might be as well to try the inn first, he decided, and dismounting, he hitched the mare to a post and, unwinding his muffler, entered the hostelry.

As the door swung wide a wave of heat and noise engulfed him, and he stood for a moment, half blinded by the glare of the

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swinging lantern. The bar was crammed with leather-faced fishermen, most of them puffing away at clay pipes, sipping their tankards and talking in rough tones.

Mr. Tittleton pushed through the crowd to the counter.

The potman had but one leg, but he hopped around so nimbly on this that the loss of its neighbour appeared to cause him no inconvenience. Sighting the beadle, he stumped to the counter and asked his pleasure.

"A glass of brandy," said the beadle, searching through the many pockets of his garments for his purse. When at last he discovered it he found that he had no small change, and was obliged to proffer a guinea.

The peg-legged potman spun it with a whistle. "I'll ha' to ask the landlord for change," he said.

The beadle clutched his glass and fumed. He was feeling apprehensive and wished that he had not been obliged to display the contents of his purse, which was well stocked with guineas. These fellows looked wild enough to risk anything. It would look well if the Truro beadle was set upon and robbed of his money outside a village alehouse!

At last the potman arrived with his change, which he handed over ostentatiously, clinking the coins as he counted them into the beadle's outstretched palm.

"Thank you," Mr. Tittleton mumbled; then: "Have you seen aught of a law officer in these parts?" he asked.

His voice was pitched low; but as the beadle spoke a hush fell upon the babel of talk and an uncanny silence ensued. The potman stared, as if endeavouring to imprint every detail of his questioner's appearance upon his memory.

"A runner? No, sir. I'll ask the comp'ny."

Before the beadle could prevent him, he repeated the question.

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"A runner? Nay, we ain't seen no runner," said an evil-faced man with a bald head. "Ha' we, John?"

"That we ain't, Ahab!"

"Nay," chimed a third.

"No redbreasts hereabouts," croaked a fourth.

The beadle had sensed, when first he entered the inn, that his appearance had excited an unhealthy degree of attention; now, however, he was the cynosure of all eyes.

"I am seeking Mr. Trunnion, the Bow Street law officer," the beadle repeated, clearing his throat self-consciously. "But it would seem that none of you can help me, and, as I appear to be interrupting your conversation, I'll take my leave . . ."

The potman essayed an attempt at hospitality. "Nay, sir; stay an' drink yer fill! 'Tis a rough night outside."

For a moment Mr. Tittleton thought that the company would prevent his leaving. He tossed down the brandy at a gulp and, shuddering from the fiery liquor's descent of his throat, headed resolutely for the door. The sullen ranks of fisherfolk opened sufficiently for him to pass. Out of the corner of his eye he noticed that the potman was conferring with a group of men near the rear door of the taproom. They had gone before he gained the front entrance.

Bursting out of the inn, he made for where he had tethered the mare. The night seemed black as pitch after the glare of the tavern. He jerked at the reins, trying to free them from the post. Already he could hear the stamp of feet as his pursuers rounded the inn.

The reins came free; he set one foot in the stirrup and made to mount. His assailants were almost on to him, but he could see no trace of them in the dark. Then a hand reached out of the night and smacked the mare on the rump. With a shrill whinney of

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fear, she kicked up her heels. The beadle lost his footing and toppled to the earth. They were on to him immediately. He put up the best fight he could, but he was handicapped from the onset by a sack which was thrown over his head. Soon he was enmeshed in its grimy folds and a length of rope was twined around his body.

"Get him away to the back," said a hoarse voice. "Bring the mare, Eli."

The beadle was bullied along for a few paces but, as he made such heavy weather of it, his captors overbalanced him and carried him to the rear of the inn, where he was tipped into an evil-smelling outhouse and left to brood on his fate.

Time passed. Voices could be overheard from the inn, and presently they were raised in song. "The ruffians are making a night of it," the beadle thought ruefully.

At length booted feet crunched the gravel and the door of his prison was opened. He heard a squeak and squeal of wheels.

"Up wi' him, lads!"

The whole world heaved as the beadle was wafted aloft; then he was dumped upon a flat surface and realised that he was lying on a barrow.

As the *cortège* rumbled away through the night the beadle wrestled vainly with his bonds. He would never live this down if it became known. But perhaps he was not going to be allowed to live, anyway! A chill descended Mr. Tittleton's spine and he shuddered.

The hand cart struck off across country and its occupant was shaken unmercifully. The wind still howled and roared and the sack grew heavy with moisture from the falling rain. Then the nightmare journey came to an end. The beadle was manhandled up some steps and through a doorway.

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He heard a receding clatter of booted feet on flagstones; then a door slammed and there was silence.

For a spell Mr. Tittleton stood with his back to a wall, a vicious draught whipping at his ankles and the sodden sack clinging to his shoulders. Although his legs were free he dared not advance so much as a step for fear of some invisible pitfall. His brain raced frantically. What were his mysterious captors' intentions? Could they mean to murder him? But no; surely that was beyond the bounds of possibility! The Truro magistrates—to say nothing of Justice Pumphreys—would be bound to wreak summary justice on any who presumed to maltreat the person of a beadle. And yet there was little doubt that Mr. Trunnion had been treated in a similar fashion to himself—and *he* was a Bow Street Runner!

Mr. Tittleton's morbid reflections were cut short by the return of his persecutors. They were accompanied by a stranger, for the beadle's ears—which had been sharpened by the curtailment of his other senses—detected the lighter tapping of fashionable shoes.

"This is him, yer honour," said a rough voice.

"Good. Put him in with the other fellow," replied the newcomer in tones which struck a chord in the beadle's memory.

Mr. Tittleton was seized and trundled down a stairway. Door hinges scraped and then, soaked and battered and mortally injured as to dignity, the beadle was tossed on to a heap of straw and left in clammy darkness.

Gentleman Jim Investigates

BOTH the Golden Mace's paying guests were missing. The innkeeper was not particularly surprised when Mr. Tittleton failed to return; there was something about the pompous beadle that made him a natural prey to misfortune.

Late that eventful evening Abednigo, Jeremy and Jim Hawker foregathered in the kitchen. The wind was still ranting outside, making the window shutters creak and the sign above the door swing wildly. The two men sat on either side of the range and Jeremy squatted on the hearth. They were awaiting Mr. Prescott and were not surprised when a soft rap came at the rear door.

Abednigo ushered in his guest and drew a chair towards the warmth of the flames. The Excise officer sat down, nodded to Jeremy and eyed Jim Hawker.

"You have a cool nerve, Mr. Hawker," he remarked. "I should not be able to take my ease, knowing that two officers of the Crown were like to burst upon me at any moment."

"That's just it, sir," replied the innkeeper. "Neither the beadle nor Mr. Trunnion are hereabouts. The law officer's been abroad all day; and when he failed to appear at supper time Mr. Tittleton went in search of him. Now they're both missin', and we suspect they've fallen foul o' Lord Craven's agents."

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"But it's cleared the air round about the inn," the highwayman remarked.

"I'll not hear you speak thus of honest men, sir!" Mr. Prescott said heatedly. "This can only mean an addition to our problems, for we must make some effort to discover what has befallen them. But to business, gentlemen. I have made what provision I can for Saturday. I have sent a report to my superiors at Looe, along with a request for assistance. I have also sent to Major Thomas, at Bodmin, asking him to dispatch a company of dragoons. But it is the problem of implicating Lord Craven that is most exercising my mind, for he will be certain to keep out of the way when things start moving—be away in Town or have some other alibi."

"Aye; that's the poser," Abednigo agreed. "He's a fly cove, an' will go careful if he suspects your intentions."

"No; he will not come into the open if he can help it," the Revenue officer agreed, "nor will he venture anything that might link his name with that of Patch Henderson. I think it is safe to assume that my erstwhile prisoners are in hiding at Craven Hall. They will have been kept at hand for the coming enterprise, and there's nowhere else in the vicinity where they could remain hidden."

"We *could* attack the Hall," the innkeeper remarked, "but it'd be a risky business."

"And the ruin of us all if it did not come off," retorted Mr. Prescott. "We've no proof remember, and could bring no charge that would stand in a court of law."

The innkeeper replenished the glasses. "Tell us how you plan to prevent the *Bristol Merchant* being taken," he said.

The Excise officer drank deeply and wiped his mouth with a handkerchief while he marshalled his thoughts.

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"She's due on Saturday, the fifth of the month, in the late afternoon or early evening," he began. "The Shadow has two plans, as Mr. Hawker has remarked. The first, to send a fishing boat out from Prestwyn with Patch and his fellows concealed below deck. The vessel is to approach the bullion ship on some pretext and ask for help. Patch is to board the ship and, when he has taken control, drive her aground in the vicinity of Prestwyn to be stripped of her cargo. The second plan is to be used should the *Bristol Merchant* arrive after dark. A false beacon is to be erected on Reynold's Point, which her captain will mistake for the Marrow Head light. The result of this error will be to bring his craft aground at approximately the place the wreckers have planned."

"But she'll be right on Lord Craven's doorstep!" Jim Hawker exclaimed.

"What of that?" the Revenue officer retorted. "There'd be no evidence to connect the disaster with his lordship. Wreckers have no dealings with the nobility in the normal course of affairs. If we did not know what we do of the Shadow's identity we should never suspect Lord Craven of having a hand in this affair."

Mr. Prescott took out his long pipe and filled it from a pouch. "Now, as to my precautions. The Looe Revenue cutter should arrive on Friday evening when, together with my smaller vessel, she will wait in full sailing order at Colin's Cove. I do not know as yet whether the dragoons will be sent, but if they come the men will be billeted in the village and deployed on the day as their commander sees fit. I shall march my own fellows down to the beach at Prestwyn during the afternoon and attempt to intercept the Shadow's men as they take up their stations."

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"But surely the Shadow'll cry off if he gets wind o' all these preparations!" Abednigo remarked.

"He may indeed—but he is a clever rogue and like to spring some ruse and upset our calculations. With regard to the alternative plan; if the *Bristol Merchant* fails to show up before dark both my men and the soldiers will hold to their posts and a party will be dispatched to Reynold's Point to watch for any activity in that quarter. Men will also be posted at Marrow Head to ensure that the beacon is not interfered with."

"Those appear to be sound provisions," Abednigo remarked. "But what about my chaps; where do they come in?"

"Think you they would fight against their neighbours?" Mr. Prescott asked shrewdly.

"Aye; that they would. We have no truck wi' wreckin' in Polryn."

"Then do you hold them in reserve, ready to reinforce our attack, whenever and wherever it may develop. Now, what of Mr. Trunnion and the beadle? They went Prestwyn way, you say."

"The beadle set off on the law officer's trail at six o'clock or thereabouts. He ought to have been back by now." Abednigo shook his head. "He's put his head in a noose tryin' to rescue the law officer, you may depend on it!"

Mr. Prescott frowned and drummed upon the table top with his fingers. "We want no trouble at this stage," he said. "If I go to Prestwyn and start asking questions 'twill bring a hornet's nest about our ears."

"Then let me go instead!" exclaimed the highwayman.

Mr. Prescott shook his head. "They know you, Mr. Hawker. You'd soon join the beadle and his friend. And seeing they are both on your track you would scarcely find it to your liking. Be-

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sides, you did not appear distressed by their plight when I first arrived."

"I know," the highwayman admitted. "But now the notion appeals to me. A highwayman rescues a law officer and a beadle from evil doers. It's never been done before. And I had thought of trying my hand at a disguise."

The Revenue officer pooh-poohed the idea until Abednigo related how Jim Hawker had passed by Mr. Tittleton in broad daylight. Then: "What kind of disguise had you in mind?" he asked.

"I'd thought of a pedlar," the highwayman said. "Abednigo will furnish me with some old clothes and a few oddments. I'll make my way to the Ship and see what I can discover; after that, why, I'll take a look at Craven Hall."

The Excise officer considered. "You are a brave fellow, Mr. Hawker," he said at length. "But be careful. If you fall into the Shadow's hands at this stage of the game it will most likely mean your end. As to the things for your pedlar's pack; Meg has more fripperies than any girl has a right to. Jeremy shall go with me to my house and bring them for you."

"You think it safe for the lad to venture abroad?" Abednigo asked.

"I don't believe Lord Craven will harm him, now that I have given it some thought. 'Twould only serve to show the truth of his tale were he to vanish once again."

"Ye may well be right," the innkeeper agreed. He went to the kitchen dresser and, rummaging in a drawer, took out a pistol. "Here, Jeremy; take this wi' ye. 'Tis primed an' loaded. Mind ye don't go shootin' innocent villagers, though!"

Jeremy slipped on his coat and put the heavy weapon into his pocket. Mr. Prescott also prepared to leave, and together they

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ventured into the darkness. The gale had all but blown itself out and its passing had left the air pure and sweet. The sky was as clear as crystal and peppered with stars.

Mr. Prescott mounted his horse and made room for Jeremy in front. Then they clopped rapidly through the darkened village. When they arrived at the Revenue officer's house the boy was shown into the kitchen while Mrs. Prescott crept upstairs in search of properties for the pedlar's pack.

Presently Jeremy was on his way back to the inn, on foot and alone. He went cautiously for he had no desire to fall into fresh trouble. Rather to his surprise, he gained the kitchen of the Golden Mace unscathed.

When he entered the room he burst into laughter. Abednigo had dressed the highwayman in a coat and breeches several sizes too large for him and frayed at the knees and elbows. He had begrimed Jim Hawker's face and greased his curling locks back into a queue. A filthy flannel shirt replaced the usual cambric and ruffles, and altogether the transformation was complete. No one would ever guess that this bedraggled creature was really the dapper Gentleman Jim.

"Ye mustn't forget to speak rough," Abednigo cautioned.

"Evenin' gents," said the mock pedlar in a cringing whine. "Any knives or shoe buckles?"

"Ye'll pass," the innkeeper pronounced. "Now for the pack. What did Mr. Prescott give ye, lad?"

The boy produced his haul; Abednigo added some items from the drawers of the dresser and stowed the whole collection away in a worn leathern satchel.

"There ye are, Jim," he said. "Good luck go wi' ye." He rounded on Jeremy. "'Tis long past yer bedtime, lad," he reminded him.

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"Good night, Father, Mr. Hawker," Jeremy said, and turning, he made for the stairs.

But as the highwayman quitted the yard, Jeremy left his room by way of the window and the outhouse tiles and followed in the pedlar's wake. Jim Hawker had not passed the boundary wall when the lad caught up with him.

"You can't come with me!" the highwayman protested.

"Why not? I might be able to help."

"But what will your father say when he finds out?"

"I'll worry about that when it happens," Jeremy retorted.

Jim Hawker capitulated. "All right—but when we reach the Ship, you'll remain outside, mind."

Brownny carried the pair of them with ease, and before long they found themselves approaching Prestwyn. Although it was dark they could see their way well enough by the light of the stars.

The Ship tavern hove into sight. Although it was all but eleven o'clock, the hostelry was doing good business.

"Now, lad," the highwayman said, "wait here with the mare till I come out. If anyone passes, slip into the cover of the hedge."

The pedlar shouldered his pack and entered the inn. It was bright inside, but the air was so heavy with tobacco smoke that he could scarcely see across the room. Several men were lying about the floor, snoring lustily. There was one crowd in a corner and another at the counter. He shuffled to the bar.

"A glass of ale an' a mite o' bread an' cheese, master," he said to the one-legged potman. "I've come all the way from Helston on naught but a drink at a stream."

The highwayman realised with a thrill that the fellow was the one he had last seen leaving the shore cave; there were three other men, too, who had been seated in the smithy, standing to

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one side with their heads together. He felt sure that they could, if they pleased, tell him what had become of Mr. Tittleton and the law officer.

The potman slapped a jug of ale and a platter of bread and cheese on the counter, eyeing his customer curiously.

"That'll be tuppence, please."

The highwayman paid up and took his purchases; then he sidled along the counter until he was standing hard by the smith's cronies.

"Evenin', gents," he mumbled through a mouthful of bread.

"Evenin'," said a balding, rat-faced man. "A pedlar, are ye?"

"That I am—and 'tis no life for anyone at this season o' the year. What wi' snow an' rain an' frost an' cold, an' me sore vexed wi' the ague."

"'Tis rum ye want for that complaint," said the bald fellow, eyeing the pedlar's jug.

"An' how might a poor soul like me be able to drink rum wi' taxes so high?"

"Would ye care to earn a shillin'?" the ruffian countered.

Jim Hawker pricked up his ears. "Aye; that I would!"

Rat-face motioned him to draw near with a jerk of his head.

"Ye'll be passin' through Polryn this night?"

"I will, if it suits my pocket."

"Then ye could deliver a message to Mr. Prescott o' the Customs."

"He'll be in his bed!"

"'Tis an important message—one as he'll not object to risin' for." The bald man eyed him suspiciously. "Can ye read?"

The pedlar shook his head.

"Here 'tis, then." Rat-face produced a leather wallet and withdrew from it a piece of dirty and folded paper. After hesi-

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tating for a moment he stowed this away again and returned the wallet to his pocket.

"How d'ye know ye can trust me?" asked Jim Hawker.

"Because I'm comin' with ye as far as Mr. Prescott's door." The fellow leered and pulled out a knife.



"In that case, why don't ye take the message yerself an' save the shillin'?"

The ruffian's expression registered cunning. "Because it's a kind o' surprise, see. I don't want the tide waiter to set eyes on my dial."

Here was a pretty kettle of fish, thought the highwayman. Jeremy was waiting outside. How could he warn the boy that he had a companion? Mayhap the fellow would have to go round to

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the stable to fetch his horse; that would give him a minute or two. And what was the mysterious message? Could it be an intimation from the Shadow that he was holding the beadle and the law officer as hostages for the Revenue officer's good behaviour?

They stepped out of the inn.

"Where's yer mount?" asked the highwayman, his voice raised for Jeremy's benefit. There was no sign of the boy.

"My cob's hitched to the rail," growled Rat-face. "Let's be movin'."

Jim Hawker and his unsavoury companion mounted and trotted towards the beginnings of the cliff path. The highwayman kept their pace as slow as he could. He had no wish to leave Jeremy behind in Prestwyn, where every man was a potential foe.

"Get on wi' ye. 'Twill be mornin' 'ere we reach Polryn at this rate!"

But still the highwayman lagged.

Slow as their progress was, they reached the outskirts of the village and began to climb towards the cliff path. The way became more open as the trees thinned.

Rat-face was about to rate the pedlar once again for his tardiness when a somewhat breathless voice cried:

"Stop and put up your hands!"

Almost an Escape

RECOGNISING Jeremy's voice, Jim Hawker reined in; Rat-face automatically followed suit, peering around for the source of the command. He espied a slim figure, scarcely visible in the starlight, and a pistol pointing at his midriff.

"What d'ye want?" he gasped.

"Naught but a word with the pedlar," replied the boy.

The "pedlar" was now holding two pistols of his own, and seemed in some mysterious way to have grown taller and straighter.

"Get down from that cob," Jim Hawker ordered. "I'm eager to learn what that letter of yours contains. Hand it over!"

Rat-face was thoroughly quelled. He did as he was told, surrendering the paper meekly.

"Tie his hands with his scarf, Jeremy, and loop the ends through my stirrup leather."

The boy set about this task; meanwhile the highwayman unfolded the paper. He held it close to his eyes, but the starlight did not suffice to show the words inscribed upon it. Fortunately he had his tinder box in his pocket; the impregnated rags flared up and burned long enough for him to read:

"The Shadow begs to inform Mr. Prescott that he holds the

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lives of law officers cheap and any attempt to interfere with his plans will result in their instant demise."

Jim Hawker dropped the tinder as the flames reached his fingers. So that was it! Lord Craven meant to turn the capture of the beadle and the law officer to his advantage. Well, it had probably saved their lives—had the notion not occurred to him he would doubtless have given orders for their immediate dispatch.

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"We know where they are now, Jeremy," he told the boy. "Shall we risk a visit to the Hall?"

"Don't forget the Shadow's threat," Jeremy replied. "From what I've seen of Lord Craven he's quite capable of carrying it out—and what shall we do with this man?"

"We'd better take him with us to Polryn. You there, what's your name?"

"Ahab," the fellow snarled.

"Did you have a hand in taking the beadle and his pal to Craven Hall?"

The question took Rat-face by surprise. "How come you know about that?" he asked.

"I know who your master is. If you want to save your hide you'd best answer my questions and do as I say."

"I'll tell ye naught," Ahab growled.

Jim Hawker made up his mind. "We'll pay a call on Lord Craven," he said. "Friend Ahab'll have to walk while you ride his cob, Jeremy."

They jogged along until they reached the path leading to Craven Hall, Ahab trotting by the highwayman's horse, tethered to the stirrup leather.

Jeremy guided the highwayman to the edge of the garden, where they left their mounts and proceeded afoot,

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having bound their prisoner and propped him against a tree stump.

The garden appeared to be deserted; but they were not to gain the Hall unmolested, for as they crept past the marble urns and lichen-covered statuary they became aware of padding paws and quick panting.

"The dogs!" Jeremy gasped.

"This way," snapped the highwayman.

He made towards a tree which grew close to the wall flanking the mansion, with Jeremy hard on his heels.

Scrambling into the lower branches, they drew up their legs. The hounds came loping up. There were three of them, lean-shanked, hungry-looking beasts. They whined and snuffled at the base of the tree, pawing the trunk and making upward leaps.

"What now?" Jeremy gasped.

The highwayman fumbled in his pockets. "I had the dogs in mind when I thought of coming here tonight," he replied.

He leaned down, a chunk of meat dangling from his fingers. The hounds, scenting the tasty morsel, leapt and slavered. Presently one more athletic than its fellows contrived to capture the meat and crouched down to eat it. The other brutes immediately forgot the treed humans and set upon their companion, worrying the meat clenched in its teeth.

"Now's our chance," the highwayman whispered.

"You think it safe to climb down?" Jeremy was dubious.

"Not to the ground—over the wall!"

The boy craned his head and saw that the tree in which they were perched was only a matter of feet from the wall. A branch arched in that direction, just above their heads.

Jeremy ventured first, climbing up and straddling the branch.

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The end dipped beneath his weight, creaking ominously. Fortunately, it came to rest on the wall top. Arriving safely at his goal, Jeremy called softly to his companion.

The highwayman followed; they sat for a moment on the top of the wall.

There was a drop of ten feet or so to the ground. Jim Hawker slipped off his ragged cloak and Jeremy lowered himself to the earth by hanging on to it, his feet scraping the weathered bricks. Then the highwayman descended, leaving the cloak attached to the tip of the branch. As they crept away they could hear the dogs quarrelling over the piece of cold pork from Abednigo's larder.

They had not taken a dozen paces when the highwayman halted and laid a warning hand on Jeremy's shoulder.

A man had slouched into sight around the side of the mansion, heralding his arrival with a shower of sparks from his pipe. It was plain from his demeanour that he had noticed nothing out of the way.

The two intruders were in the middle of the kitchen garden. Hard by stood a pile of rubbish which the gardeners had heaped ready for burning, and this masked them from the watchman's gaze. They dropped on to their stomachs; but, quick as this movement had been, the man remarked the sudden stir and his eyes swivelled in their direction. They lay still, hoping that the fellow would pass; but he turned towards them and, arriving at the heap, poked the twigs and dead leaves with a stick.

His mouth gaped when he spotted the highwayman. Quick as light, Jim Hawker lashed out with his feet, catching the watchman behind the knees and sending him sprawling. Leaping up, the highwayman flung himself on to the fellow, and Jeremy added his weight to the attack. Luck came to their aid, for the

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man's pipe had been forced down his throat by the sudden assault and this so upset him that he could do little beyond gasp and choke. Soon he was overpowered and gagged with Jim Hawker's grimy neckcloth and his threshing limbs secured with a length of twine. Bundling him on to the heap of rubbish, the pair continued towards the Hall.

Candlelight flickered at one of the lower windows. Crossing a stretch of gravel, they arrived at the side wall of the mansion. Raising their heads, they peered into the lighted room. Two men were sprawling at a table, half asleep. An empty brandy bottle showed how they had whiled away the time.

"They'll be the prisoners' guards, most likely," whispered Jim Hawker. "I wonder if the beadle and his pal are in the cellar?"

"I should say so," Jeremy replied; "see there."

A familiar key lay on the table near the brandy bottle.

"How are we going to get in?" the boy continued.

"Not here," the highwayman replied, and he moved away along the wall towards the neighbouring window.

Taking a ring from his pouch, the highwayman reached up to the pane of glass nearest the catch. Jeremy heard a scratching sound, followed by a faint rap and the tinkling patter of glass.

"Diamonds come in useful at times," his companion remarked.

The sash slid silently in its grooves. Jeremy and Jim Hawker entered the room that lay beyond.

It was a scullery. They padded towards the door, narrowly avoiding an upturned pail. Jim Hawker peered into the corridor. Faint grooves of light showed at the edges of the door of the inhabited apartment.

The highwayman took out his pistols and cocked them. "Do just as I say, lad," he whispered. "I'll throw open the door and

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take them by surprise." He thrust a coil of rope into the boy's hands. "I came prepared for this, too," he added.

They traversed the short distance on tiptoe. Jim Hawker took hold of the door handle, twisted it and flung the door wide. He was covering the two ruffians before they realised what was afoot.

The guards jerked into wakefulness, one overbalancing his chair as he sat upright. The crash of its fall echoed like thunder in the silent house.

"Stay still!" the highwayman commanded.

The two watchdogs made a sorry pair. The still seated man remained with his feet on the table, his hands extended above his head. His comrade sprawled where he had fallen, blinking dazedly at the intruders.

"Keep your hands aloft," Jim Hawker cautioned. "See if they have any barkers, Jeremy, before you truss them up. Mind you don't come between them and my pistols."

Jeremy searched the various pockets of the men's garments and then lashed them up as well as he could with the twine. Much to his relief, no one appeared to discover the source of the noise.

When Jeremy's task was accomplished to the highwayman's satisfaction, and the prisoners had been gagged with their own neck-cloths, the two made for stairs leading to the cellar, Jeremy having snatched the key and Jim Hawker a candlestick.

So far their activities appeared to have disturbed neither Lord Craven nor any of the servants slumbering above stairs. What with the hounds, the watcher in the grounds and the men supposedly on the alert on the ground floor, the Shadow must have felt that his establishment was well guarded.

There was a delay at the foot of the stairs while Jeremy unfastened the door. During this interval, Jim Hawker adjusted a

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scarf over his face. "Don't want the beadle and his chum to recognise me if it can be avoided," he explained.

Jeremy opened the door and they stepped into the cellar. Two sleeping figures were huddled on the heap of straw that Jeremy had cause to remember: the portly beadle and the slender law officer. Crossing the dank stones, they shook the captives into wakefulness.

The beadle started up with straw in his mouth: the law officer screwed up his eyes to shade them from the glare of the candle.

"Who are you?" Mr. Trunnion enquired.

"Never mind that now," retorted the highwayman. "We've gone to a deal of bother to do you a good turn. Can you stand?"

"Our arms are lashed, but the scoundrels have left us the use of our legs," the law officer replied.

"Then follow us and make no sound."

"You, boy." The beadle's tone was stern. "You're the inn-keeper's son! What are you doing here?"

"Helping to rescue you, sir," Jeremy retorted.

They quitted the cellar and mounted the stairs, Jim Hawker in the lead. As his head reached ground level he realised that the two gagged men had been discovered. Lord Craven, clad in a flowing wrapper, was standing in the doorway, holding a candle. Two servants were hovering at his back and Patch Henderson was bent over the recumbent figures. The highwayman nipped out his candle.

"Quick as you can," he whispered over his shoulder.

The party flitted towards the room containing the forced window, the faint sounds of their passage masked by the babel of talk which was issuing from the group at the doorway. Lord Craven had turned to his servants and ordered them to rouse their fellows and search the grounds for intruders. As he was

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speaking a parcel of servants clattered down the stairs and the silence was shattered once and for all.

Jim Hawker, Mr. Trunnion and Jeremy gained the sanctuary of the room, but as the beadle followed the men on the stairs caught a glimpse of his ample rump. With a great shout they hurried in pursuit.

The highwayman shoved Mr. Trunnion through the open window and turned to aid the beadle, who had fallen over the pail. Even as that gentleman scrambled into the room the first of the servants appeared. Jeremy, who had remained by the door, cracked him over the head with a candlestick. The man dropped with a howl of pain and blocked the door for the few moments the party needed to get clear of the mansion. The boy caught a glimpse of his lordship's distorted features as he flung himself through the window. Landing upon all fours, he picked himself up and darted in the wake of his companions.

But they were far from being out of danger, for there remained the wall and the dogs to be reckoned with. The highwayman headed for the spot where he had left the cloak, but the darkness was confusing and the encounter with the watchman had fuddled his sense of direction. He gained the wall with the others close upon his heels, and Patch and Lord Craven no great distance behind. Feverishly he began to search for the dangling cloak.

At last his eyes encountered its black outlines fluttering darkly against the lichened brickwork. Scrambling up, he straddled the wall.

Mr. Trunnion followed him: then the beadle, taking a firm hold of the ragged garment and assisted behind by Jeremy, attempted to scale the wall. He was halfway up when Patch and Lord Craven arrived. The Shadow clutched Jeremy by the shoulders, but the boy twisted out his grasp. In doing so, however, he

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ceased to support Mr. Tittleton and with a wail of despair that worthy crashed down on to Patch and a second fellow who had just arrived.

Mr. Trunnion had bent down and clasped the beadle's hand and he, too, toppled down to add to the milling heap of bodies below. For a space all was chaos, and Jeremy was given time to join the highwayman on top of the wall.

Heedless of possible injury, they flung themselves to the earth on the far side of the wall and pelted for the cover of the trees. The hounds must have taken themselves to another part of the estate for there was no sign of them. But the fugitives did not spare them a thought as they dashed through the darkness, never slackening pace until they came to the spot where they had left their horses and the prisoner.

"No time to bother with this fellow," Jim Hawker gasped. "Get aboard that cob and let's be off!"

They galloped away in the direction of the cliffs, describing a great curve across the moorland.

The cliffs reached, they drew rein for an instant. There was no sound of pursuit. They continued for Polryn and the Golden Mace at a more moderate pace.

Viscount Spencer Reconnoitres

JEREMY slept late the following morning, for his part in the unsuccessful rescue attempt had wearied him. He crept downstairs and breakfasted in the kitchen, avoiding his father's eye. Only the lateness of the hour had saved him from punishment the previous evening and he was anxious that nothing should remind Abednigo of the promised beating. There was no sign of the highwayman.

The wind and rain of the previous day had passed, but the sky was still heavy with cloud. Jeremy felt very depressed. Lord Craven must have bundled both the beadle and the law officer back into the cellar as soon as he had recaptured them. Mr. Tittleton would never suspect that his would-be rescuers had included the notorious Gentleman Jim! For all his ferreting, the beadle seemed to have little idea of what was happening under his nose. Neither Abednigo nor Mr. Prescott had taken him into their confidence. Poor man; it seemed certain that he would never ride triumphantly into Truro with the highwayman a prisoner.

Apart from the absence of the two guests, all seemed normal at the inn. The usual customers came and went, the customary greetings were exchanged. But underlying all was a current of excitement. Time was running out, and the problem of bringing

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the Shadow into the open remained unsolved. He would stay within his great mansion whilst his underlings carried out his instructions—provided he continued with his plans. Jeremy could not help feeling that if he were the Shadow he would make some radical change in his arrangements. But Lord Craven was no fool; perhaps he meant to do that very thing!

With a rumble and clatter and a flourish of its post horn, the mail coach swayed to a halt by the gate of the inn yard. Abednigo rushed out to greet the driver and take in the mail. There was a letter for the law officer. The innkeeper slipped it into his cash drawer, wondering if it would ever find its way into Mr. Trunnion's hands.

An elegantly dressed gentleman had alighted from the coach and entered the parlour. His head was bandaged and he looked pale.

Abednigo bustled forward hospitably.

"Your name is Tregowan." The words were more a statement than a question.

"Aye, sir; that it be."

"You have a son named Jeremy, I believe."

"That I have—why; you must be Viscount Spencer!"

The visitor nodded.

"Jeremy!" shouted Abednigo, "come into the parlour; there's a gent to see you."

The boy appeared from the kitchen. "Why, sir—I never expected . . ."

"You will be surprised to see me," said his lordship. "My injury was not as serious as the doctor thought. As I was not at all clear as to what had happened I lost no time in following you up for an explanation."

"I have to thank you, sir, for the way ye assisted my son in

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his hour o' need," the innkeeper interposed. "Jeremy has told me how ye helped him to escape from that villain Snyder."

Viscount Spencer was coaxed into a chair and provided with a glass of brandy.

"Well, young man," he said, somewhat mollified, "tell me exactly what transpired after that highwayman appeared on the scene."

"'Twas a friend of mine that held up your carriage, sir," Jeremy said, and he went on to relate the circumstances which had led up to the accident.

"So this Mr. Hawker was intending to return my carriage," the viscount mused. "Deuced kind of him! Well, I suppose I shall have to credit your tale. Perhaps you will inform me where I may find my equipage?" He still seemed extremely put out, Jeremy decided.

"You don't know the half of it, sir!" he protested. "Let me explain properly."

As the boy's story unfolded, the viscount's severe expression relaxed and changed to one of interest.

"You told me about Lord Craven in London," he remarked when the tale was done. "He's no friend of mine, for 'twas he who introduced me to that rascal Sam Snyder. There's a rogue for you—expectin' a gentleman to pay his debts!" He fell silent, his fingers drumming upon the chair arm. "Mayhap I can help you, for I see where your scheme is like to fail. You'll require proof positive before you can confront Lord Craven with his crimes, and he'll be too fly to provide that. I know something already of his lordship and how he came by his title. Again, no proof; but suspicion enough to make me credit what you say of him."

The viscount's brow straightened and he thumped the chair

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arm. "I have it! I'll pay him a visit. He'll not be unduly surprised to see me, though my presence will be deemed inconvenient if he has his hands full. I'll keep my eyes open and watch for any suspicious move. Where's my carriage, d'ye say?"

Abednigo told him: his lordship rose.

"I'll go straight to Craven Hall," he said, picking up his hat. "If I discover anything of importance I'll get into touch with you at once."

He left the inn and strolled through the village. Abednigo had directed him to Ebenezer's cottage, and as luck would have it the little fisherman was seated by the door, mending a net. He made a leg as the stranger approached.

"Good day to ye, sir!"

"My carriage lies within your barn, I believe?" Viscount Spencer said.

"So ye're the gent as was spilt when Jim Hawker did his rescuin' act! Glad to see ye recovered, sir. We're all mighty grateful to ye for aidin' Jeremy and the girl Meg! Please to step this way, sir. Ye'll excuse the pigs?"

Mr. Catchpole escorted his distinguished visitor into the barn where the carriage stood. He had cleaned the vehicle thoroughly, and groomed the horses, and the viscount was vastly pleased with the condition of his property.

"You have done well, Mr. Catchpole!" he exclaimed. "Here's a guinea for your pains."

Gratified by this princely recognition of his services, Ebenezer harnessed the horses into the carriage and led the coach on to the road. Viscount Spencer mounted the box and clattered off towards Craven Hall.

The distance was short and soon the vehicle was moving along the drive leading to the great house. There was a road of

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sorts which led from Polryn to the main gates of the Hall. These were at the rear of the mansion, for the place was so constructed that it faced the sea. There was no road leading from the front, beyond the rough track which joined the cliff path.

A footman hastened out to greet the visitor.

"Good afternoon," the viscount replied. "Is his lordship at home?"

"I will inform him of your arrival at once."

"This is an unexpected pleasure," said Lord Craven, when Viscount Spencer had been announced. "Have you come to take more money from me at picquet?"

"That amongst other things," replied the viscount cheerfully.

They were in the library, an opulent room lined with books which had gone unread since the old lord's day. Large windows looked over the flower beds and stone cupids towards the sea, steely grey and heaving on this calm afternoon. Lord Craven was attired in a suit of blue velvet and his ruffles were immaculate. He seemed not at all concerned at this arrival of an unexpected guest. Viscount Spencer remembered Jeremy's accusations; here, in this calm apartment, they seemed preposterous. He would wait and see, he thought. Time would surely tell.

"You have had an accident, I see," remarked his host.

"Just a tumble," the viscount replied evasively.

"I was planning a visit to Town," Lord Craven continued. "Were you thinking of staying long?"

"Just for a day or so, if that will not inconvenience you. This place is so restful after the bustle of London. I envy you your retreat, 'pon my soul, I do! And you did tell me to come whenever I pleased, you recollect?"

"Of course I do, my dear fellow." His host sipped delicately at his wine. The viscount studied him. His dark eyes gleamed.

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What was their true expression? It might be either friendliness or annoyance, he could not say. His welcome had not been as cordial as it might have been; but that was understandable, arriving as he had done out of the blue.

"There are no other guests here at present," Lord Craven informed him, "so we shall have to defer our game of cards for the time being. What is it, Robert?" (this to the servant, who had just entered).

"Your pardon, m'lord. Would you come to the servants' hall for a moment?"

"You will excuse me, Spencer?" Lord Craven followed the footman out.

The viscount began to feel ill at ease. There was something not quite right about the atmosphere. It was not Lord Craven's habit to dash away at the bidding of a servant. He sat twiddling his wineglass; then, acting upon an impulse, rose and went to the door. His Lordship was standing at the foot of the stairs, listening intently to what a roughly dressed fellow had to say. The viscount could just catch the whispered words.

"'Tis the very same, I tell ye, m'lud! I recognised it as soon as I set eyes on it!"

Lord Craven stroked his chin. "Then what Snyder said in his letter is true. Spencer did spirit the brats away in his carriage! But if that is so, what is he doing here?"

Viscount Spencer tiptoed away from the door. What was he to do? It would hardly pay him to remain at Craven Hall if his part in the children's escape became known. He crossed to the window. It was open a few inches. The balcony outside had steps leading down to the ground. He placed a hand on the frame of the window and then paused: Lord Craven had returned to the room!

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"Come, my dear viscount! Surely you aren't thinking of leaving? And by the window, too. Sit down and let us have a little chat."

The viscount turned. A pistol glittered in Lord Craven's hand. He gestured with it to the chair upon which his guest had been seated. "Do as I say," he snapped, the silken banter withdrawn from his voice. "And be so good as to tell me what you know."

Viscount Spencer sat down. "Very little," he replied, "beyond the fact that you appear to be an utter scoundrel."

"You have yet to learn how much of a scoundrel I can be!" gritted his lordship. "You have come to my house in the guise of a guest. Very well, you shall remain—but as a prisoner! Henderson!"

Patch shambled in, looking out of his element in these luxurious surroundings.

"Lash me this fellow and take him below," Lord Craven snapped.

"Aye, aye, m'lord," growled the smuggler.

He advanced upon Viscount Spencer, and then hesitated. "No rope, m'lord," he said apologetically.

Lord Craven fumed. "Robert," he shouted, "fetch a length of rope."

After a tense interval this was provided; thus armed, Patch advanced once more upon his victim.

But the viscount's ire was roused. "Keep your distance, fellow!" he exclaimed, and struck out at the fellow's loutish features.

Patch sprang back and cannoned into Lord Craven, jogging his pistol. The weapon exploded and the ball creased the footman's scalp. Viscount Spencer grabbed a chair, whirled it around



"Surely you aren't thinking of leaving?"

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his head and sent it flying at Lord Craven's head. Footsteps resounded in the corridor; reinforcements were on the way! The viscount took a running leap at the window and sailed through, the weight of his body shattering the slender frame. A shower of glass splinters cascaded on the terrace. Landing on all fours, he scrambled to his feet and shot away like a hare.

The upset in the library had given him a moment's grace. By the time Lord Craven had reached the shattered window he was halfway across the garden and heading for the quickset hedge. His lordship, followed by Patch and his Prestwyn band, tore in pursuit like a pack of wolves.

But their quarry vanished in the shrubbery and Lord Craven and his myrmidons were brought to a check: there was no clue to the direction the fugitive had taken.

Viscount Spencer followed the hedge as far as the rustic gate. Passing through, he continued along the far side, using the thick growth of the hedge as a screen. He was bruised and bleeding from a dozen cuts. What doubts he had entertained as to Lord Craven's innocence had been effectively dispersed. He had to get back to the Golden Mace with a whole skin at all costs. He regretted not heading for his carriage, which stood at one side of the drive. It was too late now to think of turning back, however.

As the Shadow and his retinue poured out of the Hall the viscount arrived, stumbling and breathless, at the limits of the hedge. To the left lay a wide expanse of moorland; the view to the right was more promising. Gorse bushes and stunted trees grew as far as the cliff path. The men from the house were making along the side of the hedge as he darted from bush to bush. He heard voices raised in argument over the path their quarry had taken. Presently the searchers split up, some racing

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towards the side of the Hall, others heading in his direction. He hurried on.

At last he gained the cliff path. Turning in the direction of Polryn, he made the best speed he could. There were hoarse shouts as he was sighted. A hasty backward glance revealed no less than six fellows approaching over the rough ground; the leader was no more than thirty yards distant.

Hoofbeats drummed upon the path behind him and a man on horseback cantered into sight. Anticipating no help from this quarter, the viscount hurried on. Then he heard the sharp crack of a pistol: turning his head, he realised that the newcomer had fired at his pursuers. The mounted man drew rein as he caught up with the fugitive.

"Up with you, m'lord!" he snapped. "We'll do 'em in the eye yet!"

Viscount Spencer clasped the extended hand and felt himself hauled on to the horse's flanks. Then, clinging on desperately, he was borne away from his enemies at a rapid pace. The rider turned. His face was lean and tanned and there was a humourous quirk at the corners of his mouth.

"'Twas lucky I happened to come this way," he said. "I know you, sir; d'you know me?"

"No," panted the viscount.

"Gentleman Jim Hawker, at your service," grinned the highwayman.

Abednigo Takes a Hand

THE forces of law were gathering in Polryn. A company of dragoons was drawn up near the harbour wall, their uniforms dazzling in the autumn sunshine. Their horses pawed and snorted, and the riders, conscious of the village maidens' admiring glances, encouraged them to rear and cavort. Major Thomas, the commandant of the Bodmin garrison, had accompanied the men in person and was now closeted in Mr. Prescott's office.

"Well, sir," he was saying, "I only hope that your information is trustworthy. The fact that the *Bristol Merchant* carries bullion was supposed to have been kept secret. She is sailing without an escort and that fact makes the leakage more serious. Even so, it is no light matter to bring a body of men more than fifty miles if it proves to be a wild goose chase."

Mr. Prescott was showing signs of the strain the events of the past days had imposed on him.

"This is a serious affair, I do assure you, major," he replied. "I have definite news that an attempt is to be made tomorrow to drive the *Bristol Merchant* ashore. The thing is too big for my men to handle unaided. I should not have troubled you otherwise. As it is, the Looe Revenue cutter is coming and between us we should be able to scotch the wreckers."

ABEDNIGO TAKES A HAND

"You say you have discovered the identity of this Shadow fellow," the major remarked, helping himself to snuff.

"I have indeed; but there is no evidence as yet. My hope is that he will incriminate himself tomorrow. I ought not to mention names in the circumstances, but just between ourselves it is no less a person than . . ."

Mr. Prescott was interrupted by a tap at the door. An underling put his nose around the corner and coughed discreetly.

"Your pardon, sir; there's a gentleman to see you."

"Did he give his name?" the Excise officer asked irritably.

"He did, sir---Lord Craven."

The head disappeared; then the door was flung wide and Lord Craven made his entrance. He was attired in a buff top coat and glossy riding boots. A riding crop was tucked beneath his arm.

"Good day, Mr. Prescott," he said, flashing his white teeth. "And to you, sir. It is not often I give myself the pleasure of calling on our Customs' representative. But perhaps I have come at an inconvenient time?" He glanced out of the window at the throng of scarlet-coated soldiery on the quay side. "Poltryn is not often graced by the presence of a company of dragoons. You will be Major Thomas, I presume?"

The major bowed stiffly. "My men are here at Mr. Prescott's request, sir. He tells me that he has every hope of laying this Shadow rascal by the heels; indeed, he was about to reveal the fellow's name when you were announced."

His lordship registered interest. "I should like to hear what you have to say, too, Mr. Prescott. We've been plagued long enough by the villain. Come along then, man; tell us his name!"

Mr. Prescott did his best to conceal his emotions. How dare

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Lord Craven beard him in his own office! He could not say outright what he knew to be the truth, and his lordship was well aware of that fact.

"I was about to remark to Major Thomas that it would not do for me to mention names without proof—especially in front of witnesses. I know what I know; but for the time being I must keep the information to myself."

He turned to the officer of dragoons, whose brows had shot up at this prevarication. "If you would kindly excuse me for a moment, major, Lord Craven could state his business without delay . . ."

"As you wish," replied the major rather huffily, and he turned to leave the room.

But Lord Craven stayed him with an expansive gesture. "There is no call for you to leave, sir. What I have to say concerns you as much as Mr. Prescott. I have heard rumours that the Shadow and his accomplices intend to waylay the *Bristol Merchant*. She is a cargo ship, as you may know, and passes by our coast tomorrow. I saw notice of her movement posted in Lloyd's circular."

His lordship propped one booted leg on a chair and tapped his knee with his riding crop to emphasize his next words. "My feeling is that the fellow may attempt to use my stretch of the beach for his dirty work. That portion of the shore between Prestwyn and Marrow Head would be ideally suited to his purposes. If I were you, Mr. Prescott, I should post your men thereabouts. I will afford you every facility. And you are free to billet as many of your fellows as you please at Craven Hall, Major Thomas. I know how difficult it is to find accommodation for soldiers. As Justice of the Peace, it is my duty to assist in putting down all forms of lawlessness. And now I will take

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up no more of your valuable time, gentlemen. I bid you good day."

With a flourish of his hat, Lord Craven took his leave.

"A most helpful gentleman," Major Thomas remarked. "I shall avail myself of his offer to house some of my men. But you were about to tell me who the Shadow is. I can understand your reluctance to do so with a third party present."

"The Shadow, Major Thomas," said Mr. Prescott grimly, "is no less a person than Lord Craven himself!"

The major's brows shot up once more. "You can't be serious!" he gasped.

"I was never more so."

"And you are convinced of this?"

"Thoroughly convinced—but I have no evidence, as his lordship knows. Mr. Prescott went on to relate the adventures of Jeremy and his niece.

"If this is true," said the dumbfounded major, "and I know you for an honest man, I fail to see how you can expect to catch him out. He'd never have shown his face here this morning if he was not confoundedly sure of himself. And what are we to make of his offer to help?"

"He has some deep scheme laid for tomorrow, I have no doubt," Mr. Prescott returned gloomily. "We can but be on our guard and try to catch him in the act. To be honest, I see no hope of netting the Shadow himself. If we can save the *Bristol Merchant's* cargo we shall have done all that can be expected of us."

Major Thomas nodded. "Well; I will away and see to my men's comfort. In the light of what you have told me they had better stay in the village."

"Tregowan at the Golden Mace will take a few," Mr. Pres-

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cott informed him. "He's a rascal; but he is with me on this occasion—and, if you please, his smuggler band is to join us on the morrow."

The Revenue officer stayed the major's departure still further to relate the story of the beadle and the law officer. Viscount Spencer's escapade had not as yet reached his ears.

Major Thomas scratched his head. "It would seem that the Shadow holds all the cards," he said ruefully. "We can only hope that fortune favours us tomorrow."

Viscount Spencer had arrived at the Golden Mace up behind the highwayman. Abednigo was surprised to see him returned so soon. Bessie fetched some water and bathed his cuts, and re-bandaged his head, and when he had refreshed himself with a glass of the innkeeper's brandy he felt quite his old self once again.

"I should have thought of my carriage being recognised," he admitted to Abednigo.

"Who could ha' guessed they'd be on to it so soon?" the innkeeper replied comfortingly.

"Jem Millar must have been at the Hall," put in Jim Hawker. "It was lucky I happened along when I did."

Viscount Spencer eyed his rescuer. "Indeed it was! You have more than made up for your mistake, Mr. Hawker."

There was a sound of horses in the road and Jeremy, who was nearest the window, exclaimed: "Dragoons! And they're stopping outside."

A dozen men clumped into the parlour, headed by a sergeant. He saluted the innkeeper smartly.

"Major Thomas's compliments, an' we're to be billeted in your hostelry overnight."

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"Bid your men take their ease," the innkeeper replied. "I expect ye'll all take ale?"

"That we will, sir." The sergeant's eyes sparkled. "All right, lads, stand easy. You, Jenkins, an' you, Brown, see to the horses."

"Things are moving at last," Jeremy thought. Now that the soldiers had arrived he was beginning to feel more optimistic over the outcome of the coming day's action. Surely these disciplined men would prove more than a match for the Shadow's motley crew. And yet the boy had a lurking suspicion that even now Lord Craven would outwit Mr. Prescott. He tried to put himself in the Shadow's place and decide what he would do in similar circumstances. He would not continue with his original plan in the face of so much opposition, he decided. And yet, what was the alternative? The *Bristol Merchant's* course could not be changed: the only variable factor was the point of interception. There was a distinct possibility that Mr. Prescott's laboriously laid net would close upon nothing more substantial than empty air!

Jim Hawker had ridden to Prestwyn to ensure that the *Fair Maid* was still at her berth. He had found her lying placidly at anchor, her deck deserted. There had been no sign of any of Patch's cronies, either. Everything had been quiet—too quiet! Abednigo had stationed two of his men to watch Craven Hall. They, too, had seen nothing out of the ordinary—until Viscount Spencer's escapade had brought them into the open. After his departure aboard the highwayman's stallion they had gone to roost once more. Their latest report had stated that Lord Craven had been seen riding towards Polryn, and that he had entered the Customs office. What his business there might be the lookout had not been able to say. Abednigo had been given no definite

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instructions regarding the morrow. And there the situation rested.

For all concerned the time could not pass quickly enough. Early in the evening, Jeremy approached his father with a suggestion. "Someone should be at Prestwyn, watching the *Fair Maid*," he said earnestly. "Lord Craven could put his men aboard, sail along the coast a mile or two, and carry out his design from another part of the beach."

Abednigo pondered on these words.

"The lad's got something there," remarked Jim Hawker. "As far as we know, Mr. Prescott has not allowed for such a move."

"We've got men watchin' the Hall," the innkeeper objected.

"So we have—but by the time they got here with the news the *Fair Maid* would be well away. They'd have an hour's start, and who could say where they'd land. Jeremy's right; there ought to be some men to prevent such a thing happening, not soldiers, but a party that could move swiftly and silently."

Abednigo smacked his thigh. "We'll take the whole band to Prestwyn over the moor! Mr. Prescott's given us naught to do. But we must send him word o' our intention. And Bessie will have to serve the dragoons as best she can."

"May I accompany you?" Viscount Spencer asked diffidently. "Now I'm in this affair I should like to see some action."

"Most certainly m'lord," Abednigo assured him.

The innkeeper, Jeremy, Jim Hawker and the viscount, made their way to Ebenezer's cottage, where the band was already mustered. A fellow was despatched to Mr. Prescott with news of the projected expedition and then they set off for Prestwyn. Most of Abednigo's force had furnished themselves with pistols for this occasion, and Ebenezer was hugging a murderous-looking blunderbuss.

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They made a detour so as to avoid Craven Hall. The wind had risen again and Jeremy was glad of the scarf he had wound around his throat. The viscount seemed most interested in his companions. It was the first time he had ventured abroad in such company, the boy decided.

It was heavy going across the moors. The ground was soggy and full of pitfalls. But the innkeeper and his companions knew the district like the backs of their hands and moved with confidence where a stranger would have soon been utterly lost.

If Lord Craven had spies abroad they saw nothing of them, and they had passed Prestwyn by before Abednigo turned towards the coast. Cottages came into view, candlelight streaming from tiny windows. They headed towards the harbour. At length the innkeeper raised his hand and the band came to a halt, crouching down in the lee of a wall. The lapping of the sea came plainly to their ears.

Below, no more than twenty yards off, the *Fair Maid* lay at anchor. "They ain't gone yet, then," Ebenezer was heard to whisper. They settled themselves to wait.

An hour passed and, well versed in night work as they were, the men began to shuffle and to talk in low tones. Had he made a mistake, Jeremy wondered?

Then Abednigo, who was keeping watch, tensed and strained his eyes. Black as the night itself, a file of men approached the quay. There must have been forty of them. Silently they dropped into the fishing boat. Should he give the signal to attack, Abednigo wondered?

But the innkeeper was too late in making his decision. With a faint scraping sound and the thud of mooring ropes dropping on to the deck, the vessel moved away from the quay. It was a perfect piece of organisation.

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The innkeeper turned to his cronies. "That beats all!" he whispered.

"There's another boat just along the quay," said Jeremy. "Let's go after them!"

His father hesitated for only a moment. It would be a desperate measure—but Patch and his associates had to be followed. Once the *Fair Maid* was lost in the dark there would be no means of tracing her.

They darted along the quay.

The craft Jeremy indicated was smaller than the *Fair Maid*, scarcely more than twenty feet in length. "'Tis Patch's lobster boat," whispered Mr. Catchpole.

They scrambled into her and cast off the mooring ropes. There was no lack of hands and the sail was soon hoisted and trimmed to the gusty wind.

The *Fair Maid* was still in sight as they left the harbour, and it was not long before those aboard her realised that they were being followed. A spate of oaths reached Jeremy's ears across the water, followed by the crack of a musket. There was no room in the lobster boat to take cover, for twenty men were huddled in a space no more than six feet each way, so Ebenezer, who had taken charge of the sailing, slacked off the sheet as much as he dared and allowed their quarry to gain a few yards.

Several more shots were fired, and one man was hit in the forearm, but it was plain that Patch (for surely Lord Craven was not aboard) did not intend to let his pursuers put him off course, and he sailed on. Perhaps he had decided to wait and deal with Abednigo's company when it came to land.

There was nothing the innkeeper and his followers could do for the moment beyond keeping the fishing boat in sight—no easy task what with the darkness and an uncertain wind to fill the sail.

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Soon, to make things worse, a heavy mist began to rise from off the sea, and altogether it was a most uncomfortable journey. They had to cling together to keep from falling over the low gunwale; and when Ebenezer put the vessel about, every man had to duck to allow the boom to swing across. Now and again a marksman aboard the *Fair Maid* sent a shot winging overhead; but owing to the poor visibility and the boat's motion, the balls fell mainly into the sea.

For the better part of two hours the chase continued. Patch's craft was fast, and it was only Mr. Catchpole's adroit seamanship that prevented her from drawing away. Then, without warning, the *Fair Maid* put in towards the shore. Cliffs loomed out of the darkness and the crashing of billows and falling away of surf came to their ears. There were rocks near at hand.

"Surely they don't mean to run their craft ashore!" growled Abednigo.

They strained eyes and ears to learn what was afoot. The *Fair Maid* heaved wildly on the inshore waves, apparently heading straight for the beach; but at the last moment she hove to and the small boat she carried on deck was lowered.

Ebenezer turned his craft into the wind and Abednigo's band watched and waited. Patch was taking a risk, for the sea was heavy and the *Fair Maid's* dinghy frail. One by one, no less than seven men leapt into it, biding their time as the water rose and fell. When they were aboard the cockleshell set off for the beach, landed its complement and returned to its parent vessel.

"Patch is settin' his fellows on shore to wait for morning," Abednigo remarked. He turned to Ebenezer and the highwayman. "What'll we do? Shall we land and try to nobble 'em?"

"It would be a long shot," returned Jim Hawker. "But if we

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stay where we are we shall be half frozen and fit for naught by dawn."

"Take us ashore then, Ebenezer!" exclaimed the innkeeper. "But not just here. Sail along the strand a piece."

The wizened fisherman swung the lobster boat away, leaving Patch to discharge his men in peace.

A quarter of a mile farther along the beach Abednigo instructed Mr. Catchpole to head for the shore.

"Think ye can beach her, Eb.?" the innkeeper asked.

"'Tis mortal risky," his lieutenant replied.

"Risk it, then!"

There was a bad moment when they weathered the breakers; then the lobster boat's nose was buried in the wet sand. Her passengers scrambled ashore. "This is a real adventure," Viscount Spencer remarked as he wrung sea water from the skirts of his coat.

"'Tis hardly begun," replied Jeremy. "We have to close with those ruffians yet!"

They hauled the boat clear of the waves and then stamped about the sand, slapping their sides, for they were all numb with cold.

"She'll bide safe enough," said Ebenezer, nodding towards the boat.

"Come on!" called Abednigo.

Keeping close together, the party moved off in the direction of Patch and his followers.



Into the Shadow's Hands

THEY were concealed from Patch and his companions by a bend in the coast. The spot was a desolate one, doubtless chosen by Lord Craven. High rocks towered on the landward side and there was no sign of habitation. As they went, those of Abednigo's band who had pistols saw to their priming; the remainder grasped their cudgels more firmly.

"Steady now," the innkeeper cautioned.

Only a short distance now separated them from the wreckers. The boat had returned to the *Fair Maid*, which was now standing out to sea. It was hard to estimate the number that had come ashore, but there seemed to be quite a crowd near the cliffs, where a huddle of figures were trying to light a fire.

"There's but one thing to do," Abednigo muttered; "go at them bald-headed!"

"Give them a chance to settle," urged the highwayman.

"I have had no experience of this sort of thing," interposed Viscount Spencer, "but I feel sure that our best plan would be to send someone back to Polryn in the lobster boat to rouse out the dragoons. They could arrive at this place long before day-break, and close in as soon as the light permits. The remainder of us could stay here and watch."

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Abednigo slapped his thigh. "By the saints! That never occurred to me. We'll do as you suggest. Ebenezer; ye're the man to sail the boat. Think ye can find this place again?"

"Surely," the little fisherman returned. "We be about a mile past the Cabin Rock, 'cordin' to my reckoning."

"Who's to go wi' ye?"

"I will," offered the highwayman.

"And I." "Me, too," joined in two more voices.

"Very well," said the innkeeper. "Make what speed ye can. We'll post watch an' await yer return."

The four men shoved off the lobster boat and set a course that would take them well clear of the shore. But the men on the strand were not the only consideration; the *Fair Maid* was skulking near at hand and it would not do for them to encounter her.

Progress was slow on this return journey for the wind was almost dead ahead, and Mr. Catchpole had to move against it in a series of tacks. Nothing could have been worse from the point of view of concealment. The *Fair Maid* would still be well armed, despite the men who had been put ashore, and she was sailing without lights, which would make her difficult to spot. The highwayman was keeping watch in the bow; suddenly he called softly: "There she is, curse it!"

Their erratic progress had brought them clean upon the vessel they wished so much to avoid. She lay hove to, rolling in the steep seas. Mr. Catchpole wrenched the tiller over and the boom of the sail swept across the deck as they changed course. It was hard to tell whether they had been sighted; but even if the worst had happened it would take their enemies a few moments to get under way.

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They crossed the *Fair Maid's* bows at a distance of feet. Two fellows were leaning against the cover of the companion way, and as Jim Hawker watched he saw one of them raise his hand and point.

Mr. Catchpole muttered beneath his breath.

The fellow who had sighted the lobster boat raised a musket. The weapon cracked thinly and the ball tore a hole in the sail. This was rapidly enlarged by the action of the wind.

"That there sheet'll tear clean across in a few minutes," muttered the little fisherman.

The *Fair Maid's* sail was trimmed and she set off in pursuit.

Mr. Catchpole was obliged to slack away from the eye of the wind to reduce the strain on the damaged sail. Everything depended on that piece of canvas. The tear spread as far as a seam and then stopped. The sail might last for another mile or so if he nursed it, Ebenezer decided. But the *Fair Maid* was picking up speed and their short lead soon began to decrease.

"She's gainin' on us fast, Mr. Hawker!" shouted Ebenezer. "What'll we do?"

The highwayman gnawed his lip. "Make for the shore," he said, "they won't be able to follow us into the shallows."

The bow of the lobster boat swung towards the breakers.

The *Fair Maid's* master sensed their intention and did his utmost to head them off. The man with the musket had reloaded no easy task in the windy darkness—and now loosed off a second shot which sped wide.

For a moment it looked as if the larger vessel might head them off, but they sped by with a few feet to spare. The *Fair Maid* sheered off, her bottom almost aground. The lobster boat tossed wildly in the surf as she lost speed; then her bows touched the strand. Mr. Catchpole, the highwayman and the two members

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of Abednigo's band scrambled over the side and threshed wildly towards the shore.

Mr. Catchpole estimated that they had all of ten miles to traverse. But they were not unduly downcast; for, despite their wetting and the loss of their means of transport, there was time and to spare for their errand.

Presently they were obliged to scale the cliffs and move along the headland. When about two hours had passed Ebenezer nudged the highwayman to say that they were nearing Prestwyn. The highwayman raised his eyes to see cottages outlined against the deep blue of the night sky. They descended to the road and by-passed the harbour. There was not a soul stirring and they gained the comparative safety of the sand on the far side of the village unmolested. Presently they arrived at the stretch of beach below Craven Hall. Jim Hawker reasoned that they were safe from observation—Lord Craven would hardly expect to find Abednigo's cronies trudging thereabouts at that hour of the night.

Then the youth Joe Pawle, who was one of the party, approached to say that he had spotted two men climbing down the face of the cliff. The highwayman followed the direction of his pointing finger. A single glance confirmed Joe's assertion. Two dark figures were frantically scrambling towards the beach. As they continued to gaze several more men appeared at the cliff top.

"What on earth are they up to?" gasped Ebenezer.

The climbers were taking terrible risks in the darkness. The cliff was almost sheer, and although the irregular surface provided foot and hand holds aplenty it would be an easy thing to slip and fall headlong.

"'Tis that Bow Street fellow and the beadle!" exclaimed Jim Hawker.

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"This is no place for us," the fisherman remarked.

"We must stop and give them a hand," the highwayman objected. "We can't let the Shadow recapture them!"

"What of our mission?" Ebenezer reminded him.

But Jim Hawker was making towards the foot of the cliff, and the other followed reluctantly at his heels. Neither the beadle nor Mr. Trunnion were friends of theirs and they could see no reason for risking their necks. But there was something piquant about this situation which made it irresistible to the highwayman.

The hunted pair were now halfway down the cliff. Four men were following them. Jim Hawker could hear them calling to one another. He hastened to the base of the cliff, and pulling his scarf across his face, called: "This way!"

The fugitives peered down: Mr. Trunnion was slightly ahead of the beadle. "Who are you?" he panted.

"One who wishes to aid you. Make for where I am standing. I'll try a shot at those fellows aloft."

The highwayman raised his weapon and fired. "Stay where you are!" he shouted to the men on the rock face.

The pursuers hesitated, taken aback by the shot; then, knowing they made a poor target in the dark, they continued to descend.

Mr. Trunnion gained the sand, closely followed by the beadle, whose face was beaded with sweat.

"Away with you as quick as you can!" the highwayman snapped. "You have escaped from the Shadow, I take it?"

"I know not who you may be with your face so covered," said Mr. Trunnion, "or what you are doing abroad at this hour. But if you help us I will see that you are well rewarded. We are law officers."

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"I ask for no reward," said Jim Hawker as they moved away. "But I must not linger—we are bearing a message to Mr. Prescott of the Revenue, regarding the Shadow's doings."

A pistol cracked behind them.

"The ruffians are gaining on us!" gasped Mr. Tittleton.

"Faster!" urged the highwayman.

Jim Hawker turned and fired his remaining shot. A cry from the rear brought a grim smile to his lips.

Suddenly there came an exclamation from Mr. Catchpole. "The breakwater! I'd forgot the breakwater!"

A long barrier loomed ahead of them, built of stout timbers. Precious seconds would be consumed in climbing it, seconds they could ill afford. The men from Craven Hall were fast on their heels and the highwayman's party dare not risk a tussle. They had to get through and deliver their message! For a moment Jim Hawker found himself regretting that he had made their presence on the beach known; but he felt what almost amounted to affection for the portly beadle, who had striven so hard and achieved so little.

They came up to the weedy timbers.

"Up with you!" exclaimed the highwayman.

For Mr. Catchpole and the other seamen the climb presented little difficulty: the law officer also scrambled nimbly to the top. But Mr. Tittleton was almost at the end of his tether, and made heavy weather of it, the highwayman's fist in the small of his back. Feet pounded ominously in the rear. Then the worst happened. A length of wood, rotted by the salt air, gave under the strain of so much unaccustomed weight. Abednigo's men and Mr. Trunnion were astride it, urging on the corpulent beadle, and they tumbled to the sand—on the wrong side of the breakwater for safety.

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They sat up to find themselves covered by pistols.

"On yer feet!" commanded a voice.

Half dazed, they scrambled up. They were surrounded and the Shadow's men were well armed. One of them produced a length of rope and lashed their hands together.

"March!" the voice snapped, and they shuffled off in the direction of Craven Hall. The highwayman cursed impotently. He was not so much concerned for their fate as for the plight of Abednigo and his companions. What would they do when the dragoons failed to arrive? He blamed himself for the situation. He should not have stayed to assist Mr. Tittleton and the law officer. Yet any man worth his salt would have done the same.

It was a fair step to the foot of the cliff near Craven Hall. Their captors did not pause when they came to the spot where the beadle and Mr. Trunnion had climbed down, but continued until a narrow path was reached, which wound away towards the cliff top. The way was steep and treacherous and a cascade of shale marked their progress to the summit. But at length they arrived on level ground and Craven Hall loomed ahead, black and forbidding. The prisoners were escorted along the rough track and round the back of the mansion into the servants' hall. Lord Craven was seated at the head of the great table.

"Well done, Jem!" he exclaimed as the procession appeared. "But who are these other men?"

"We found 'em on the beach, m'lud; helpin' the prisoners on their way. They're members o' Abednigo's band—all save the tall feller, an' I've seen his face afore, somewhere." The scarf covering the highwayman's features had slipped.

His lordship scrutinised him closely. "'Tis the wanted highwayman," he said.

The beadle all but jumped out of his skin at this and he

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craned his head to view the man he had been at such pains to arrest.

"You are in good company, fellow," Lord Craven continued. "These creatures you assisted are law officers." He leaned forward and his expression changed. "What were you doing on the beach at this hour? Out with it! I'll lay a hundred guineas Tregowan is up to mischief!"

Jim Hawker cleared his throat. "We're saying naught," he declared.

His lordship sneered. "You were sent to spy upon the Hall." His eyes flickered. "But you have discovered nothing and wasted your time, eh?"

The highwayman nodded. It was as well that the Shadow should think he had divined the truth.

"Search them for weapons and then lock them in the cellar, Jem," the Shadow continued. "And see the door is kept fastened this time."

"Aye, aye, m'lud."

The prisoners were marshalled into a line and marched down to the cellar. When they were all within the door closed with a boom-like clang.

"So you are James Hawker!" exclaimed the beadle as soon as they were alone. "If that is so, why did you stay to aid Mr. Trunnion and me?"

"It so happens that I'm working *with* the law for the time being," replied the highwayman.

"How much do you know regarding this affair?" Mr. Trunnion interposed.

"Pretty well everything," Jim Hawker told him. "A sight more than Mr. Tittleton, unless you've enlightened him on a few points."

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"Mr. Trunnion has been at pains to make the situation clear," said the beadle in a dignified tone.

"And what do you expect to gain from this change of front?" Mr. Trunnion's voice was shrewd.

"I came to Polryn in the hope of making a few guineas," the highwayman admitted; "but Tregowan and certain events conspired to change my point of view."

"What is happening about the *Bristol Merchant*?" the law officer asked.

Jim Hawker reviewed the situation. "And if Mr. Prescott does not receive our message his men will guard an empty stretch of beach while Patch Henderson carries out the Shadow's plan farther along the shore," he concluded.

"Has the innkeeper many men with him?"

"Not enough to take on Patch's collection."

"Abednigo'll have a crack at 'em," broke in Mr. Catchpole.

"Who might you be?" the law officer enquired.

Ebenezer told him.

"So you're Abednigo's right-hand man, eh? Still, you have come down on the right side of the fence regarding this affair and that will stand in your favour when it comes to a trial."

"We're a goodish way from any kind of trial at the moment," Ebenezer retorted, "unless it be the trial o' quittin' this world for the next!"

Mr. Trunnion ignored this remark. "There is no way out of the place," he informed the company. "We escaped when the man who brought our food left the door unfastened. The Shadow is not likely to allow that to happen again."

It was cold in their prison. They huddled together in the mired straw, but slowly the feeling went from their arms and legs. Jim Hawker was plagued by thoughts of what might occur

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when morning arrived and the innkeeper was obliged to face Patch and his company without reinforcements. The *Fair Maid* had been crammed with ruffians and they must prove more than a match for Abednigo's diminutive band. It seemed, after all, that the Shadow was destined to carry through his infamous schemes. The highwayman wrestled with his bonds but the ropes had been drawn tight and he could not free himself. He peered into the musty recesses of the cellar. The door was invincible, as were the massive walls. Mr. Trunnion had spoken truly; there was no way out of the mess they were in. Jim Hawker fell to cursing his foolishness in lingering to aid the beadle and the law officer.

Mr. Tittleton was writhing nearby on the heap of straw, striving to attain a more comfortable position. The highwayman could hear his laboured breathing and sense the quivering of his pudgy limbs. The beadle had suffered greatly in his endeavours to catch up with his quarry, Jim Hawker reflected, and now that he had done so he was none the better for it.

"I believe I would prefer one of your cells at Truro to this place," the highwayman remarked by way of conversation. But Mr. Tittleton was in no mood for banter and his sole acknowledgement of this sally was an expressive snort.

The End of the Bristol Merchant

ABEDNIGO watched the lobster boat out of sight and then turned his attention to the cluster of figures farther along the beach. Patch would be on the lookout for a surprise attack, for he knew that the Polryn band had followed him—and yet he might be thinking that they had all turned back to warn the Excise officer.

After posting two of his fellows to watch the wreckers, the innkeeper withdrew the remainder of his force to await the coming of reinforcements. About half an hour had passed when one of the sentries reported that the *Fair Maid* was approaching the shore and was signalling with a lanthorn.

"They're reportin' the passage of the lobster boat, I expect," said Abednigo. "Patch'll know for certain now that someone has returned to Polryn bearin' news o' the position."

"We shall have the whole turn-out here before dawn!" Jeremy said. "Coastguards and dragoons alike."

"Let's rest while we may," the innkeeper returned.

They wrapped themselves in their coats and lay down on the strand, trusting to the sentinels to warn them if danger threatened.

Jeremy sat up as the sky began to pale. He was chilled to the

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bone. The men on duty could be seen crouching in the lee of a boulder. Evidently the night has passed without alarm. He shook his father who, indifferent to the cold, was snoring loudly.

Abednigo opened one eye. "Are they here?" he asked.

"Not yet," his son replied, "but they must come soon!"

The innkeeper hauled out his watch. "'Tis nearly seven!" he gasped. "Rouse out all!"

He went the rounds of the slumbering figures, punching and shaking. Soon all were awake.

"Here comes the *Fair Maid*," Jeremy informed the company.

The fishing boat could be seen making for the shore in the grey light.

"Keep under cover," Abednigo cautioned. He turned to scan the cliff top. "They ought to ha' been here by now," he added, half to himself.

The *Fair Maid* hove to, the boat was lowered and rowed to the beach and some of the men on shore scrambled into it. When this load had been discharged it returned and made a second trip. The boarding party was being stowed away in readiness for the *Bristol Merchant's* appearance.

Abednigo arrived at a decision. "We can't afford to wait any longer," he said. "Once they're aboard they'll be out o' reach. We'll make a rush for them when the boat returns to the strand. There can't be more than a score remainin' ashore."

The little company saw to their arms. It would be impossible to make a surprise attack; there was the width of the open beach to cross.

"Stay here, Jeremy," the innkeeper grunted to his son.

The boy's face fell and he put down the stick with which he had been making practice swipes.

The boat grounded and the third party made to climb aboard.

THE END OF THE BRISTOL MERCHANT

Abednigo leapt from cover, shouting and brandishing his cudgel, and the Polryn smugglers tore across the beach to do battle with Patch and his companions.

Patch was standing in the surf; seeing this brave advance, he bellowed a warning to the men huddled by the fire at the cliff foot.

These scrambled up and made towards their leader. They were a larger party than Abednigo had reckoned on.

The fight was fierce with no quarter asked or given. Each moment the sky became lighter. Pistols were soon discharged and either discarded or used as clubs, and sticks and fists came into play. Patch's band numbered some thirty men. Abednigo's eighteen; but so filled with zeal were the Polryn faction that for a time they more than held their own. The ruffians aboard the *Fair Maid* crowded the rail to watch the struggle, but they were powerless to assist their leader for the boat was ashore. Several of them fetched muskets and fired into the press, but the sway of the vessel on the inshore waves spoiled their aim, and after one of their own side had been winged they desisted.

Abednigo prayed that reinforcements might soon arrive, for he knew that his party was too small to bring the conflict to a successful conclusion. It began to look as if this was to be a repetition of the fight in the inn yard with Patch once again victorious.

Suddenly one of Patch's men broke away and leapt into the boat, to row like one possessed towards the *Fair Maid*. At once the men aboard realised his intention, and when he arrived by her side as many fellows as could do so crowded into the frail craft. Soon they were disembarking on the strand and joining in the fray.

Jeremy had been watching from the cliff foot in an agony of suspense. Seeing the odds thus increased against his father's fac-

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tion, he dashed into the battle; thus, when the innkeeper's party finally went down beneath the weight of superior numbers, there was no one left to bear news of the disaster to Polryn.

At least half the combatants had received a wound of some sort, either from pistol ball or cudgel blow. It had been an ill-fated venture from the outset, Abednigo reflected as he held his aching head.

"Well, Mr. Tregowan," Patch jeered, "ye ought to have stuck to yer tavern and not meddled wi' men's work. 'Twould take more than your petty crew to come 'atween the Shadow an' his prize—more than a company o' dragoons, too! As ye seem to be interested in our business ye shall have a front seat. Ye know the Devil's Bank?"

"'Tis a sandbar, covered at low water," Abednigo grunted.

"That shall be yer station for the day. Ye'll have a grand view o' the proceedin's from there. Afterwards, if there's time, we'll take ye off."

As soon as they were all aboard, the *Fair Maid* headed for the sand bar known as the Devil's Bank. Here the Polryn band were deposited on the wet sand.

Abednigo shook his fist as the fishing boat moved off. "I'll be even wi' ye yet, Patch!" he shouted.

Now that there was the opportunity, the innkeeper and the unscathed members of his company tended their wounded brethren. One man had a broken arm, and this was roughly set and bound with a strip of cloth. None of the remainder proved to be seriously injured, although they could show flesh wounds and bruises aplenty. Jeremy realised that he was bleeding and discovered a long cut on his right forearm.

"Ye ought to ha' done as I said and stayed by the cliff," his father said as he tied it up.

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"I wish I had," Jeremy admitted, "then I could have waited for the dragoons and told them what had happened."

Abednigo shook his head. "They'd ha' been here long since if they were comin' at all."

The sand bar was about two hundred yards in length and twenty broad. At no point was it more than three feet above the level of the sea. The waves were surging almost to where they stood, and the innkeeper calculated that with the evening tide the water would rise and sweep them away—unless they were taken off. It had been a bright notion of Patch's to leave them here. Before the day ended the *Bristol Merchant* would either be firmly aground and pillaged, or safe at anchor in Plymouth Sound.

The *Fair Maid* returned to the beach and resumed her interrupted activities. From the sand bar the men on the beach looked like swarming ants. It would seem that Jim Hawker had heard aright at Tor Point. A whole host of men had been stowed away in the fishing boat and only a handful now remained on the beach, sheltering against the cliffs. This manœuvre completed, a temporary peace descended on the scene.

Hours dragged by, seeming to the battered and half-frozen men on the Devil's Bank more like weeks. Luckily the weather improved as the day wore on, and the sun made a brief appearance between the cloud banks. Abednigo prowled back and forth like a caged beast, straining his eyes for the *Bristol Merchant*. Meanwhile the *Fair Maid* cruised about, biding her time.

The bullion ship appeared about four o'clock in the afternoon, driving towards the Channel under a broad expanse of canvas.

The *Fair Maid* put about and a distress signal was hauled to the top of her mast.

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"They're goin' to pretend they've sprung their mast!" Abednigo muttered. "'Tis a flimsy pretext, seein' they're not an hour from port."

"They'll need no excuse once they've closed with their quarry," remarked one of his fellows. "See! They're wallowin' clean across the merchantman's bow!"

The shrouds of the *Fair Maid's* mainmast had been slacked off on the starboard side and the mast was lurching convincingly. Certainly, a vessel carrying that amount of sail would be driven aground long before reaching port, the wind and tide being set as they were.

The fishing boat closed with the *Bristol Merchant*. Then muskets rang out, and Patch's hordes poured over the gunwale of the larger craft. A sharp tussle broke out on the merchant vessel's deck; but this ended as abruptly as it had begun.

Abednigo was like a tiger, snarling and prowling by the water's edge in impotent fury, heedless of the spray that soaked him to the skin. "They've done it!" he shouted wildly. "And here we be, not able to lift as much as a finger, an' the dragoons kickin' their heels at Prestwyn!"

For an instant Jeremy thought that his father meant to plunge into the sea and swim to the *Bristol Merchant's* rescue.

Patch had plainly made an end of all resistance, for they saw that men were loading packing cases into the hold of the *Fair Maid*. This proved to be a fairly lengthy task, and it was almost an hour before the two vessels separated and the bow of the bul lion ship was turned shorewards.

"They're running her aground!" Jeremy exclaimed. "Why isn't Patch content to take the treasure and spare the ship?"

"The Shadow wants to be rid of her and her crew," his father explained. "We shall see murder done now, lad."

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The *Bristol Merchant* picked up speed, swerving to the west, where a line of rocks reared like broken teeth from the frothing surf.

"Patch must have left someone on board to steer," Viscount Spencer remarked.

"Aye—but he's also left the dinghy," Abednigo replied.

At that instant the dinghy put off from the doomed vessel and moved towards the *Fair Maid*. The *Bristol Merchant's* crew must have all been shut away below hatches, and the tiller lashed in position, for now her deck was deserted.

For a moment the vessel wavered, as if trying to evade her fate, before she headed straight towards the razor-edged rocks. The sound of the collision reached their ears across the spread of sea, a splintering, rending crash, as the bow of the bullion ship rode over the sharp tongues of rock.

It was awful to have to stand by and see the Shadow's scheme come to fruition, Jeremy thought. How easily it had been accomplished!

The *Fair Maid* was still standing by. No doubt Patch wanted to make certain that there was no chance of any of her crew surviving, before he made off.

"But surely if Patch wanted to murder the crew, he could have done so before running her aground," Jeremy said.

"He's not left it to chance," the innkeeper retorted. "Wait and see."

The stricken vessel grated upon the spines of rock, lifting to the waves. But she was now riding much lower in the water, for the sea was rushing in through the craters in her bottom.

And then it came; a dull explosion. A puff of orange flame shot up through the riven deck and baulks of timber flew into the air.

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"I thought as much!" Abednigo choked upon his anger. "They set a fuse to the powder store 'afore leavin'. Well, that's the end o' the *Bristol Merchant*—an' see, the villains are makin' off!"

The *Fair Maid* had set sail, moving westward. Evidently Patch did not intend to pick up Abednigo and his band. They had witnessed his crime and would be best disposed of. The evening tide would perform that office for him!

"We've got around an hour," the innkeeper said, his attention brought to the dangers of their position by the rapid advance of the waves. The sand bar was already shrinking, and every time the sea swept forward it hissed and foamed as if anticipating the moment when the waters would meet and submerge the Devil's Bank.

The hull of the *Bristol Merchant* had been completely shattered by the force of the explosion and there was no trace of any survivor. What a stir there would be when her end became known, Jeremy thought. Mr. Hawker had said that the bullion was the property of the government, the proceeds of confiscated properties in the Caribbean. The ministers concerned would wish that they had protected the *Bristol Merchant's* cargo by other means than secrecy! He wondered how the Shadow would dispose of the gold. Mr. Snyder would doubtless have a hand in that delicate operation.

A wave surged up the sand bar and streamed down upon the farther side. Time was running out! The marooned men had retreated inch by inch before the sea's advance and were now huddled on the highest point. Now that the drama of the merchantman's end was played out there was nothing to distract their minds from the hazards of their situation.

Heavy clouds were piling up along the southern horizon and

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the freshening breeze began to lash the crests of the waves into foam. Abednigo and his companions were soaked through. Their teeth chattered with the cold as they clasped their dripping garments around them.

"We're goners all right," muttered one fellow through blue lips.

"Keep yer pecker up," Abednigo urged. "We ain't done yet!"

A dark triangle loomed up over the eastern skyline. Some minutes elapsed before the men on the sand bar noticed it; then someone shouted incoherently and then they were all waving and shouting together.

"The Looe Revenue cutter!" the innkeeper bellowed.

Presently the Revenue cutter drew level with the Devil's Bank. Mr. Prescott was on board, and he was the first to leap into the surf and assist the frozen, bedraggled men over the side. Their nightmare was over. Abednigo and his companions crouched on the deck boards, wrapped in blankets and scarves, and the cutter sailed on.

"How in Heaven's name did you come to be there?" the Excise officer gasped.

Abednigo roused himself and pointed. "Look yonder," he said.

Mr. Prescott stared towards the shore, where the last fragments of the *Bristol Merchant* were fast disappearing beneath the waves.

"'Tis a wreck!" the Excise officer gasped.

"The bullion ship," the innkeeper said briefly.

"Then the Shadow's beaten us," Mr. Prescott replied wearily. "All day, we waited; dragoons, Revenue men and all, but not a soul stirred round about Prestwyn. We discovered that the *Fair*

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Maid was gone amissing, but there was nothing to indicate how Lord Craven had changed his plan. At length I decided to take a look along the shore."

"'Tis as well ye did," Abednigo avowed grimly. He related the *Bristol Merchant's* end.

"And they made off westward?"

"Nigh on two hours ago."

"Then there's no chance of our catching up with them." The Revenue officer's shoulders sagged. "The Shadow will have a meeting place arranged and waggons ready to convey the gold inland." He gazed up at the sky. "'Tis growing dark. We'll turn back. At least we know who is behind all this, and where the bullion is likely to show up."

The lugger wore about and made for Polryn. As they re-passed the Devil's Bank one of the cutter's crew hailed from the bow.

"There's somethin' floating on the water hard by, sir."

"A piece of flotsam from the bullion ship, most likely," said the Revenue officer.

"Aye, sir—an' there's a man holdin' to it!"

Mr. Prescott hurried to the gunwale. "Bring the cutter into the wind," he instructed.

The cutter veered and her speed fell away. A shapeless mass of wreckage was bobbing on the sea not far from the vessel's counter.

"Get a boathook into that stuff," said the Excise officer.

The wretched survivor was gently lifted inboard. He owed his life to a fragment of canvas attached to a piece of spar, for this had spread out on the water and protected him from the force of the waves.

Mr. Prescott looked him over. "He's had a bad time of it," he

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said. "Mayhap he'll pull through if we get him ashore quickly."

One of the Revenue men fetched a boat cloak and wrapped the unconscious man in its ample folds. Then he disposed him so that his head was pillowed in Jeremy's lap. The boy smoothed back the half-drowned man's lank hair and brought to light a great blue bruise, extending across his temple.

"He's taken a nasty knock," remarked Abednigo; "one that's like to keep him on his back for several days."

The Revenue officer nodded. "We must pray that he recovers," he said. "If he does this will have been the best thing that has happened today, for the fellow's testimony will place a hempen collar around Patch Henderson's throat—and may even serve to snare the Shadow himself."



Run to Earth!

It was late in the following morning when Jeremy came downstairs at the inn, refreshed by his night's sleep. Tired as he had been, he had thought at first that he would lie awake, for there had been so much to think over. The Revenue cutter had arrived in Polryn harbour and discharged its cargo of soaked humanity, which had swiftly dispersed to its respective homes. Jeremy and his father had come straight to the Golden Mace, bearing the solitary survivor from the *Bristol Merchant* along with them. It had been Viscount Spencer, who had borne the rigours of the day with surprising fortitude, who first thought of asking whether the highwayman and his companions had arrived during the night with their vital news of the Shadow's changed plan.

"Why, no," Mr. Prescott replied. "Had they shown up I should have acted at once."

"What can have happened to them?" Abednigo said worriedly.

"They had to pass Craven Hall, remember," the viscount reminded him.

"But they were in Patch's lobster boat, and ought to ha' been safe enough!"

"Mayhap they was wrecked!" someone suggested.

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"I doubt it," the innkeeper retorted. "'Tis a mystery. But Jim Hawker and Ebenezer are well able to look after themselves—an' we must rest 'afore we do anything else. What with the fight on the beach, an' the wetting, 'tis enough for one day. They'll turn up, sure enough!"

But now it was another day, and the missing men had not appeared. Jeremy had a feeling that they had met the same fate as the beadle and the law officer, in that they had fallen foul of the Shadow's agents. He broached the topic to his father, who now looked none the worse for his day of adventure.

Abednigo rubbed his chin. "I can't think how they got into trouble," he said in a puzzled tone. "We saw the *Fair Maid* after they'd passed her by, so they couldn't ha' been taken then. We shall have to think up some way to find them. But things might be worse, Jeremy. Mr. Prescott has asked the major to keep his dragoons in the district for another day or two, and he's written a letter to Bow Street, askin' for a watch to be kept on Mr. Snyder—for there's little doubtin' that the gold will pass into his hands. But Mr. Prescott's placing his main faith in the man that was picked up."

"But even his testimony will not serve to net the Shadow," Jeremy remarked.

"He's hopin' that Patch'll turn King's evidence when he realises he's goin' to swing for his part in the affair," his father explained.

"How is the man upstairs?" Jeremy asked.

"A better colour—and he seems to be coming round," Viscount Spencer informed him as he entered the kitchen.

"Then we'd best let Mr. Prescott know," said Abednigo. "Take Brownie an' ride to his house, Jeremy."

The boy hastened to the stable and saddled the horse.

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When he arrived at the Customs House, Meg answered his knock.

"You've been having lots of adventures, Jeremy," she said enviously. "Uncle Robert won't allow me to set foot outside the house since we returned from London. I'll tell him you're here."

Mr. Prescott accompanied Jeremy to the inn without the loss of a minute. They hastened to the room where the stranger had been laid, and discovered that he had indeed recovered consciousness. He was a youngish man with bronzed, aristocratic features; but there was an unhealthy pallor beneath the sun-darkened skin and he was pitifully thin. It was plain that he had seen hard times, apart from the ordeal of the previous day.

"I have you gentlemen to thank for my life," he said faintly, twisting the coverlet between restless fingers, "and I do so most heartily. The ship was blown up, I understand: of that I can recollect nothing, though all else is plain to me."

"Could you swear to the identity of the men who boarded the *Bristol Merchant* if you saw them again?" Mr. Prescott asked eagerly.

"I could indeed—and to my own, which has been lost to me for four years."

"Then we have them!" the Revenue officer exclaimed, "even though your evidence will not serve to incriminate Lord Craven."

At the mention of this name the man on the bed became strangely animated. "What has Lord Craven to do with this affair?" he asked, his face working.

"I ought not to have mentioned the gentleman, for I have no evidence that would stand in a court of law," the Excise officer replied, "but since I have been so indiscreet I will go on to explain that Lord Craven is the man behind the wrecking of the *Bristol Merchant*."

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Mr. Prescott stared curiously at the man in the bed. "May I be so bold as to ask *your* name, sir?"

The sick man sat up shakily. "I am Henry Craven," he said slowly.

There was a moment's silence.

"But surely . . ." began the Revenue officer.

He was waved into silence. "I can understand your disbelief—but I have proof. There are papers sewn into the lining of my coat—you have not destroyed it?"

"Why, no," said the innkeeper. "Bessie took *your* things downstairs to dry. I'll fetch them for you."

The stranger eyed the incredulous faces surrounding him and smiled wearily. "You must think me mad," he said, "but I repeat that I am the rightful Lord Craven. I have come to claim the title and estates from my rascally brother. My face is changed, I fear; sickness can change a man's appearance beyond belief, and I have lived in places where fever is the lot of every man. But you, sir; your name is Prescott, is it not? Do you not remember the night I disappeared?"

"I recollect the time when the old lord's eldest son rode home by way of the cliff path and was never seen again," said Mr. Prescott thoughtfully. "The verdict of the court of enquiry was that his lordship's horse had missed its footing and tossed its rider into the sea."

"I am that man. The whole affair was engineered by my brother, who stood to gain much from the deed. I was waylaid, struck down and conveyed aboard a ship which took me to Jamaica. There I was put to work along with negroes and criminals. I knew not who I was, for the blow had destroyed my memory and the half of my senses. How the scoundrels overlooked my papers I cannot imagine. I had been abroad on business con-

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cerning the transfer of my father's estates, and had the documents proving my identity upon my person. I read them through many a time during my enslavement, but the name Craven held no meaning for me in my fuddled state. All I was sure of was that I hailed from England, and I made it my aim to return as soon as I could contrive to escape. At last I was befriended by a French trader. I helped him with his business affairs, and in return he secured a passage for me on the *Bristol Merchant*. We sailed from Antigua in August. I knew the vessel carried a cargo of prodigious value, but little thought that her destruction would be the means of restoring my memory."

At this point Abednigo arrived with the precious coat. He gave it to the man in the bed.

"Have you a pair of scissors?" the stranger asked, folding the garment so that the lining was exposed.

The innkeeper furnished him with a knife and he slit the cloth, bringing to light an oilskin packet. He offered the documents this contained to Mr. Prescott.

The Excise officer scanned them. "I have little doubt that these papers will be the means of restoring you to your rightful position," he said; "but to me they mean more than that, for they will constitute a lever with which we may prise your brother from his lofty perch!"

"There is something more," said the man in the bed. "The fellow with the patch who led the attack upon the *Bristol Merchant* is the very ruffian who waylaid me on the cliff path! I would swear to his voice anywhere."

"Then we have enough evidence to bring a charge against the Shadow," declared Mr. Prescott. "He and his followers will be lying snug at Craven Hall by this time. We will have Major Thomas's dragoons surround the mansion!" He rounded on the

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innkeeper. "Will you go to my house and ask the major to come here as quickly as he can?"

Abednigo departed on his errand.

Mr. Prescott stayed by the sick man's bedside and plied him with questions, the answers to which only served to strengthen his conviction that here was the true heir to the Craven title and estates.

Jeremy interrupted respectfully. "Mr. Hawker and the law officers are doubtless at the Hall," he reminded the Excise officer. "When they are released, they too will serve as witnesses against the Shadow."

"That is true," Mr. Prescott agreed. "I intend to risk all on an attack of the Hall—and here is the major now!"

Major Thomas was told the survivor's identity and asked if he would fall in with Mr. Prescott's proposal.

"It will spell trouble for us if it does not come off," he replied gravely. "The proper course would be to take the matter to law. But that would entail endless delay and the Shadow would use his wealth to bribe a host of witnesses." He slapped his thigh. "I'm with you, Mr. Prescott! We'll sink or swim together!"

"Then we'll beard the Shadow in his den this very afternoon!" exclaimed the Revenue officer. "He'll not be expecting us—for he cannot know of this gentleman's rescue."

Major Thomas pulled out his watch. "It is eleven o'clock," he said. "We will move off at one. Now, as to strategy. I will divide my force into two parts, one to approach the Hall from the east, the other from the drive."

"And I will station my fellows upon either side of the house," said Mr. Prescott.

Abednigo coughed. "Could my band have a real job this time?"

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Mr. Prescott smiled. "They have certainly proved their worth," he agreed. "Do you arrive at the Hall in advance of the main party and nab any sentinels there might be in the grounds."

The innkeeper beamed. "Afterwards, mayhap we can join in the attack," he said.

The true master of Craven Hall raised himself upon one elbow. "I wish I could go with you," he said. "I shall not be unmindful of your help when I take my rightful place."

Abednigo's company set out at half-past twelve, half an hour in advance of the dragoons and Revenue men. Jeremy accompanied his father, determined not to miss this final adventure.

They moved stealthily towards the grounds of the mansion. All seemed at peace. The innkeeper had given a deal of thought to the places most likely to conceal a sentinel and had settled on a clump of bushes near the junction of the cliff path and the track that led to the Hall.

He ordered his men to spread out, so that if the bushes did indeed harbour a spy there would be no chance of his slipping away unobserved. As they advanced they became aware of a stirring of the foliage which the light breeze could not account for.

"Come out!" called Abednigo. "We know you're there."

There came no reply.

Abednigo levelled his pistol and a circle of grim-faced men closed in upon the clump of greenery.

They had formed a ring about the bushes when a man came slowly forth. "I knows when I'm beat," he grunted.

"Take his barker an' stow him in the bushes," commanded the innkeeper. "Now to see if there be anyone at the front," he added.

They made a circuit of the Hall, creeping and darting from

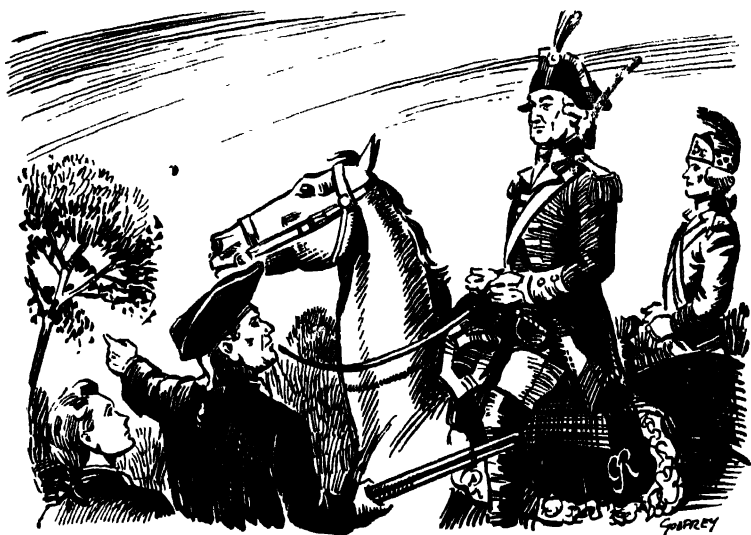
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one piece of cover to the next. Arriving at the head of the drive, they halted by the wrought-iron gates.

The innkeeper peered intently around.

Nothing stirred. The breeze rustled the branches as if they were dry bones. A colony of rooks cawed harshly.

"There's a cove around somewhere, I'll lay!" murmured Abednigo.



Suddenly the viscount pointed. "There, do you see?" he hissed.

Every man stared in the direction he indicated.

"Ah, yes," breathed the innkeeper, "aloft in that tree."

"You there!" the viscount shouted.

A surly visage peered from a space between the branches.

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"What d'ye want?"

"Come down; you'll be picked off like a sitting bird, else!"

The ruffian scrambled down from his roost.

"Let's hope that's the lot on 'em," Abednigo growled as they disposed of this second fellow. "Look; here come the soldiers!"

A party of dragoons trotted up, Major Thomas at their head.

The innkeeper made his report.

"Then let us make straightway for the Hall," replied the major. "Mr. Prescott's men are already in position."

The dragoons made a brave show as they trotted in pairs along the drive. The Revenue officer joined them near to the house.

"They know we're here," he said quietly. "But, thanks to Abednigo, we've caught them napping."

They advanced openly to the front steps. As the major got down from his horse the door was thrown open and the false Lord Craven appeared.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion?" he asked angrily.

Mr. Prescott was blunt. "We have proof that you are the Shadow," he said sternly. "We have come to arrest you."

The Shadow's eyes flashed. "On what charge, may I ask? It would appear that you gentlemen are intent upon wrecking your careers!"

"We have proof," the Excise officer said doggedly. "Unless you surrender both yourself and the ruffians you are harbouring it will go hardly with you."

The Shadow did not betray his unease by a single gesture. "I don't know what you mean," he said harshly. "Take your fellows away from my house! I am a Justice of the Peace; one word from me in the proper quarter will ruin the pair of you."

"Were you the person you pretend to be that might be so," Mr. Prescott admitted.

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"What is that you say?"

"That you are not Lord Craven, and that you have no right to occupy this mansion. That you gained your present position by a criminal act, of which we have both knowledge and proof."

The man on the threshold quailed. His mouth opened and then closed again. Then he spun round and darted into the mansion, slamming the door behind him. Bars and bolts rattled into place.

Mr. Prescott conferred with the major.

"Very well," said the latter. He turned to the dragoons. "Dis-mount and surround the building. Sergeant!"

"Sir?"

"Take six men and trim me out a small tree."

The dragoons set about felling a slender bole. With this as a ram, they approached the door of the Hall. But even as they ascended the steps a fusillade of musket fire whined through the air and four fellows dropped screaming to the earth.

The Shadow Routed

"BACK to the shrubbery!" Major Thomas shouted.

The entire company scuttled to cover. The shots had come from the upper windows in the east wing of the mansion. The major cursed. "We are committed now," he said, "but at least we know that we are on the right track, and need not fear the consequences of our actions. You men there; try to pick off those rogues at the windows."

This was easier said than done. Only an occasional movement behind the panes revealed the presence of the Shadow's men. The dragoons fired a volley, but a shower of glass and granite chips was the sole result.

"Watch out for trickery, major," Mr. Prescott cautioned.

A sergeant came hastening up to report the mansion surrounded, adding that he had warned the soldiers to keep under cover.

"Good," said the major; then, to the men who had fired at the windows, and were busily reloading: "You will cover us while we make another attempt to break in."

He turned to the innkeeper. "Take your fellows round to the rear of the Hall and station them beyond the hedge. When we get a footing inside, the villains may try to make a break for it."

THE SHADOW ROUTED

The Polryn faction sidled away.

Major Thomas made a dash for the Hall entrance, followed by a party of men who snatched up the tree trunk. Directly they revealed themselves, the firing broke out afresh; but this time the snipers' aim was less accurate, for they were harassed by the covering fire of the dragoons stationed in the bushes. But once they had reached the cover of the shallow porch, the major and his men were out of the line of fire and set about the door with great ferocity. At the third blow the panels caved in, and drawing their sabres they rushed into the mansion.

The hallway was empty.

Rather surprised at the ease with which they had gained entry, Major Thomas and the Revenue officer sent their men darting across the drive and into the mansion. This manœuvre was completed without further shooting. Then the ground floor was thoroughly searched.

Not a soul was to be found in any of the apartments.

"Try the upper rooms," panted the major.

Heavy boots pounded up the stairway and resounded in the corridors of the first floor. Even the apartment from which the musket shots had issued was deserted, although spilt powder and fragments of glass proved that it had recently been occupied.

"There's something odd about this," Major Thomas grunted.

A soldier darted up and saluted smartly. "Cornet Saunders sends his compliments and begs you to spare him a moment, sir," he said breathlessly.

Rather impatiently, the two men followed the dragoon to a bedroom at the rear of the mansion.

The cornet greeted them excitedly. "Take a look over there, sir," he said, indicating a narrow crack in the surface of the wall.

"'Tis a secret door," he added, rather unnecessarily.

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They carefully examined the wall. The concealed panel had been carelessly closed by the escaping men—had this not been so it would never have been discovered, for when the hinged section was pushed to, the join it made with the surrounding area of the wall became invisible.

The major swung the panel open and peered into the musty blackness beyond. There were stairs in the thickness of the wall, leading downward.

"Find me a light of some kind," he snapped to the cornet. "We must discover where this leads to. Quickly, now; there's not a moment to lose!"

Abednigo, Jeremy, the viscount and the smuggler band crept around the side of the mansion to their appointed station. They kept clear of the windows as far as they could; but if they were spotted there was no acknowledgement in the form of musket balls. As they went they heard the repeated crash of the battering ram and the cheer that greeted the door's collapse.

The hedge gained, they flung themselves down. Abednigo made a peep-hole between the close-growing boughs.

"Can't see anything," the innkeeper grunted after a while. "It looks as if the Shadow's surrendered."

The only sign of life was the backs of the dragoons watching the Hall, scarlet blotches amidst the greenery.

Then one of the fishermen, growing restless, chanced to glance behind. He gasped and plucked at the innkeeper's sleeve.

The Polryn faction turned their heads in time to see the vague outlines of a party of men vanishing into a belt of trees bordering the garden. The last of the fleeing men turned for a backward look at Craven Hall.

"'Tis Jem Miller!" gasped Jeremy.

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"They've escaped!" shouted his father.

Heedless of the danger of breaking cover, Abednigo's company dashed in pursuit of the Shadow's myrmidons, plunging through the mire of the freshly turned land in the direction of the spinney. The innkeeper was convinced that the fellows they were chasing were Patch Henderson's crew. They crashed through the underbrush and darted between the trees, and, as they reached more open country, saw the fugitives heading for Prestwyn. They had a fair start, and Abednigo began to wonder if his company could overtake them before they reached the harbour. He could see Patch now, pounding along in the van of his men; but there was no sign of the Shadow.

Soon Patch and his fellows came to the outskirts of Prestwyn village. The stir of their arrival brought gaping housewives to their cottage doors. John Crowther, the smith, appeared at the entrance to his workshop, wiping his hands on a piece of rag. Seeing his cronies in full flight, and hard pressed—for several dragoons had joined in the chase—he retired into the smithy and slammed the doors after him. Patch shook his fist and bellowed something about "fair weather friends" as he passed by.

Breaths were coming raspingly now, and hearts were pounding, as the Shadow's men gained the harbour. It was Patch's intention to board a fishing vessel, and this was accomplished by the time Abednigo's company reached the quay. The commandeered boat swung away towards the harbour entrance, low in the water from the weight of her rascally cargo.

The innkeeper's men fired their pistols at the deck of the swaying craft without any noticeable effect. Then they heard a clattering of hooves and, turning their eyes towards the road, saw that Major Thomas and his soldiers had arrived in force. Throwing themselves from their saddles, the dragoons lined the quayside.

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"Pick off the steersman!" the major shouted, taking in the situation at a glance.

A ragged volley rang out.

The man at the tiller cried out and crumpled to the deck. The vessel veered. Patch bellowed and waved his arms and a second fellow dashed to the tiller and wrenched it hard over. But this action was taken too late. The boat had reached the mouth of the harbour and her involuntary change of course had set her head towards the sea wall. For a few breathless moments the watchers on the quay wondered if she would clear this obstruction, but no; the fishing boat collided with the massive stones and the men crowding her deck toppled like ninepins.

Abednigo's men, together with the dragoons, dashed along the quay and, leaping aboard, soon quelled what resistance the shaken men could offer.

"That's the small fry accounted for," declared the major, mopping his brow. "But it would appear that we have allowed the Shadow himself to slip through our fingers."

Jim Hawker, Mr. Catchpole, the law officers and the two fishermen were led, blinking and unkempt, into the light of day, by a search party of dragoons.

"We're Major Thomas's men," one of their rescuers informed them.

"Then the Shadow's on the run!" exclaimed the highwayman.

"That he is!" agreed the soldier. "Got away from the Hall by a secret passage, I just heard."

They were standing at the head of the cellar steps. The shattered front door afforded them a view of the winding drive and, even as the dragoon was speaking, there came the sound of wildly

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galloping horses, the flailing swish of a whip and the rumble of wheels. Then the highwayman caught a fleeting glimpse of a passing carriage and, seated on the box, the berserk figure of the Shadow.

"That's Viscount Spencer's carriage!" cried Jim Hawker. "And the man we want driving it!"

He dashed out of the Hall, followed by two of the dragoons, and crossed to the line of military horses. Leaping into the saddle of the nearest mount, he dug in his heels and made off after the flying vehicle.

The Shadow glanced behind and, seeing his enemies in full cry, lashed with even greater venom at the pelting horses.

By a lucky chance Jim Hawker had taken a powerful roan stallion and, being an excellent horseman, he soon began to overtake the lurching carriage. The fugitive emptied his pistols in the highwayman's direction without scoring a hit and then turned his attention to his driving.

The carriage raced through the gateway leading to the Polryn road at a breakneck pace, with Jim Hawker not a dozen yards behind and the dragoons close upon his heels. The cavalcade pounded along the rough track, the carriage lurching madly. Yet ever faster went the Shadow as, heedless of danger, he urged his horses to a frenzied, heart-breaking pace. Now and again he turned his pallid visage towards the highwayman to discover if his enemies were falling back.

But Jim Hawker was steadily gaining ground and the passage of a few minutes brought him level with the driving box of the carriage. The Shadow glared down at him with fiery eyes.

"Pull in," the highwayman shouted, "or I'll force you off the road!"

The demented figure made no reply and, throwing aside all

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caution, swung the carriage on to the grass verge and made off across country, the highwayman doggedly keeping pace by the head of the offside horse.

The carriage jolted over the grass tussocks. Its course was a great curve, for the horses veered constantly to the left in an attempt to avoid the flashing hooves of the highwayman's mount. Thus they swept on, evading bushes and trees by less than inches. Soon the coast came into view and the hunted man became aware of a fresh danger. He hauled at the reins; but the horses had been driven to a frenzy and were now completely out of control. With undiminished speed the carriage lurched on to the cliff path.

The highwayman fell back, sensing the outcome of this nightmare dash.

The carriage thundered on for a few yards and then arrived at the edge of the cliff. So great was its speed that for an instant it seemed to have taken wing, the horses galloping upon air: then it dropped from the highwayman's sight and crashed down upon the rocks below.

Approaching the brink of the cliff, Jim Hawker looked down. The carriage lay in a shattered heap, half covering the bodies of the horses. The false Lord Craven had been flung a great distance and the set of his head and limbs plainly showed that he was dead.

Gentleman Jim Takes His Leave

THE Golden Mace was full of light and the sounds of gaiety, for a large company was assembled in the parlour, where Bessie, with a great display of ribbons about her dress, was dispensing drink to the assembly. The rightful Lord Craven, well advanced on the road to health, occupied the place of honour, flanked by Viscount Spencer, Mr. Prescott, Mr. Tittleton and the law officer. Abednigo was hovering in the background, his face resembling a setting sun; Jeremy sat on a settle against the hearth and Ebenezer Catchpole and the remainder of the Polryn band were disposed about the room in various attitudes, making the air reek with smoke from their pipes.

Major Thomas had returned to Bodmin along with his dragoons, and another face was missing—that of Gentleman Jim Hawker, the highwayman.

The only unhappy man in the entire gathering was Mr. Tittleton. "I can't understand how he contrived to slip away!" he said for the tenth time. "He was surrounded by dragoons when the Shadow fell to his death—and yet by the time they had ridden back to Craven Hall he had disappeared."

"Come, man," said Mr. Trunnion, patting the beadle's back till he choked over his brandy, "you'll have him yet. He cannot

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hope to escape with a man of your calibre on his tail—then think how pleased Justice Pumphreys will be!”

“I owe a great debt to Mr. Hawker,” said Lord Craven; “and, indeed, to all of you, for it is thanks to your exertions that I find myself restored to my rightful place.”

“We’re all pleased to ha’ been of some service, m’lord,” declared Abednigo.

“You have made amends to me already,” laughed Viscount Spencer. “The carriage you’ve given me from the stables at Craven Hall is a far more handsome vehicle than the one in which your rascally brother rode to perdition.”

“That were a real treat the way Sam Snyder was caught,” remarked Abednigo to Mr. Prescott.

“I have not yet heard how that came about,” said Lord Craven curiously.

“’Twas this way,” explained the Excise officer, crossing his legs. “It appears that a ragged, half-starved youth named Mike wandered into the office of the City of London Bank in Leadenhall Street, carrying a paper parcel. Much to the clerk’s amazement, the fellow proceeded to unwrap a bar of solid gold! He wished to sell it, if you please, and admitted that he had taken it from his master’s safe. The ingot was stamped with a government mark and was soon identified as part of the bullion removed from the *Bristol Merchant*. Word was passed to Bow Street and the runners lost no time in paying a visit to Ivy Lane—the youth willingly gave them his master’s address. The short of it is that Mr. Snyder was caught with much of the bullion still not melted down. He is to be deported, I understand, and at his time of life that is the same as a death sentence.”

“So all ends neatly,” remarked Mr. Trunnion. “I am gratified that the business has turned out so well.”

GENTLEMAN JIM TAKES HIS LEAVE

"What will happen to Patch and his cronies?" asked Abed-nigo.

"Hanging and deportation," the law officer replied abruptly.

"I'm heading for Town tomorrow," Viscount Spencer informed the company, "and I shall return a wiser man. I shall be most careful with whom I play at picquet in future. Still, if Snyder's going to be lodged at the public expense he won't be needing that eight hundred guineas I owe him."

Mr. Prescott drained his glass. "It grows late," he said, "and I must be leaving. Thank you for your hospitality, Tregowan. Pity there'll be no more of this excellent brandy when the case is done."

The innkeeper grinned. "Don't ye worry, Mr. Prescott. I've made arrangements for a further supply—an' ye're always welcome to take a glass of it wi' me at the Golden Mace!"

